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AN INQUIRY  
INTO THE RIGHT TO CHANGE THE  
ECCLESIASTICAL CONSTITUTION  
OF THE  
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES  
OF MASSACHUSETTS.

WITH A PREFACE, ADDRESSED TO THE REV. JOSEPH LYMAN, D. D.  
UNDER THE SANCTION OF WHOSE NAME SUCH A CHANGE HAS  
BEEN PROPOSED TO THE PEOPLE OF THIS STATE,

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

Dr. Morse's Report to the General Association of Massachusetts, from the  
Panoplist of August, 1815.

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From the PANOPLIST, August, 1815. Volume eleventh, p. 357.

## RELIGIOUS INTELLIGENCE.

EXTRACTS FROM THE MINUTES OF THE GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF MASSACHUSETTS PROPER, HELDEN AT ROYALSTON, ON THE FOURTH TUESDAY, VIZ. THE 27TH DAY OF JUNE, A. D. 1815, AND CONTINUED BY ADJOURNMENT TO THE 29TH OF THE SAME MONTH.

The Rev. Joseph Lyman, D.D. was chosen Moderator, and the Rev. James Murdock, and the Rev. John Codman, were chosen Scribes.

The members next presented their credentials.

Thursday morning, June 29th, 8 A.M. met according to adjournment. After prayer took up the business assigned to this hour.

Voted, to go into a free discussion of the subject of the following motion : " That the Report of the Committee appointed to inquire into the history of an original MS. Document, &c. be printed, and copies sent to the several Associations in our connexion, for the purpose of ascertaining the publick sentiments respecting the plan of ecclesiastical order therein presented, and that the subject be called up at the next meeting of the General Association." After the discussion, the motion was passed into a vote, and Messrs. Morse, Codman and Woods, appointed a Committee for publishing the above mentioned Report, with instructions to print it in connexion with the preceding vote.

### REPORT TO GENERAL ASSOCIATION.

THE Committee of the General Association of Massachusetts Proper, appointed at their last annual meeting at Dorchester, "to inquire into the history of *an original MS. document,\** found among the papers of Rev. DR. COTTON MATHER, containing an answer to the question, 'What further steps are to be taken, that Councils may have their due constitution and efficacy in supporting, preserving, and well ordering, the interest of the Churches in the country?' And 'particularly to ascertain, whether the resolves it contains were carried into execution at the time, and to what extent ; and to report at the next annual meeting of this Association, on the expediency of a recommendation of this body, of the plan of discipline there proposed, either entire, or with alterations and amendments, to the consideration of the Associations and churches in our connexion,'"—have attended deliberately and prayerfully to the weighty and very important business committed to them, and respectfully submit the following

### REPORT.

THE *history* of the Document aboved escribed, other than what is contained in the published minutes of the last meeting of the General Association,† so far as your Committee have been able to ascertain it, is summarily as follows : Shortly after it had received the sanction of the Convention of Ministers in Massachusetts at their annual meeting in May, 1706, this Document was published by the Rev. JOHN WISE,

\* This Document may be found in the Panoplist for July 1814, p. 320.

† See Panoplist before quoted.

of Ipswich, in a work entitled "*The Churches' Quarrel Espoused*." The signatures, and the fact that the Proposals received the approbation of the Convention of Ministers, were omitted by Mr. WISE, in his publication, and appeared in print for the first time, in the Minutes of this Association.

The Proposals embraced under the *first* Division, recommending the formation of Associations, and suggesting their appropriate duties, it appears were so far regarded, as that twenty years after, "the country was full of Associations, formed by the pastors in their several vicinities, for the prosecution of evangelical purposes."\* The Proposals under the *second* Division, recommending the *Consociation* of the pastors and Churches, and forming them into standing ecclesiastical Councils, for certain purposes therein stated, were (as Dr. C. Mather informs us, in his *Ratio Disciplina*, published in 1726) substantially adopted, at the time, in Connecticut, and have ever since formed the basis of their ecclesiastical proceedings. In Massachusetts the same writer states, that "there were some very considerable persons among the ministers, as well as of the brethren, who thought the liberties of particular Churches to be in danger of being *limited* and *infringed* in them. In deference to these, (he adds) the proposals were never prosecuted beyond the bounds of mere proposals."†

Your Committee, in this place, take leave, in fulfilment of a part of the duty assigned them, to state, that the Proposals last alluded to are, in various respects such, that in their opinion congregational ministers cannot consistently recommend or approve them. They forbear to enlarge on this subject, and beg leave to refer to the plan submitted at the close of this report, as containing the deliberate views of the Committee.

Further light, your Committee conceive, may be thrown on the history of the Document in question, by a recurrence to its origin and design, which may be inferred from its introductory sentence—"To serve the great intentions of Religion, which is lamentably decaying in the country." Viewing, as it appears they did, with deep concern, a visible decline in the order, discipline, purity, and fruitfulness of the Churches, the body of the Clergy of that day, devised the means suggested in the Proposals in question, as the best remedy against existing evils. The principal cause, of this lamentable decay of religion, in the view of the framers of these Proposals, may be inferred from the remedies which they propose for their removal; and from a paper annexed to this report, published about the year 1700.‡ Among the most operative of these causes appear to have been laxness in discipline, and a growing defect in the fellowship, union and co-operation among the Churches and their pastors.§ These radical evils, which generated many others, had been gradually increasing for about half a

\* *Ratio Disciplina*, p. 181.

† *Ibid.* p. 134.

‡ See this Paper entitled, "More particular prognostications upon the future state of *New-England*," in the *Panoptist*, for July 1814, p. 324. It is referred to the reader's particular attention.

§ One of the evils complained of, and which prompted the movers of the measures proposed in the document under consideration, is thus stated: "When Councils are called by *litigant parties* in churches, upon emergencies, it had been hitherto in the liberty of each party, to choose and call their own councils, where they pleased; which left room for much partiality to operate, and *one* Council to succeed and op-

century after the Platform of the New-England Churches had been adopted at Cambridge. Fifty years experience had taught discerning men, both of the laity and clergy, that some further measures were necessary to carry into full effect some of the salutary provisions of that Instrument; those particularly which were designed to regulate the fellowship and discipline of the churches. Other provisions relating to the introduction, discipline, and dismissal of ministers, were found inexpedient in practice, and of course fell into disuse. In managing these important ecclesiastical concerns, so intimately connected with the general welfare of religion, the Churches were left, each to its own discretion, without any generally acknowledged uniform rule to govern them; and the Platform, thus disregarded in some of its essential provisions, gradually ceased to be a guide of discipline, and a bond of union in the Churches. That fellowship, mutual affection, and care; that agreement in the fundamental articles of the Christian faith, which, from the first planting of these churches had happily subsisted among them, cemented their union, and produced the best effects, after the lapse of a half a century, began visibly to decline. The wise and pious among the watchmen, perceiving these things, were justly alarmed at the inevitable consequences, and felt it to be an imperious duty to exert their best efforts to stay these evils, by strengthening the things which remained, and which were ready to die.

It was in this state of the churches, and on a deliberate view of these evils, that the Proposals in question, were devised, and on due consideration, adopted by the Convention of the clergy.

Your Committee have not sufficient facts in their possession determinately to state the various causes which operated to prevent these Proposals from going into effect. Their form was not the most unexceptionable, and hence was afforded advantage to opposers. The Consociation of Churches, though not precisely in the manner delineated in these Proposals, was not new to Christians in New-England. They well knew, that the primitive churches in the three first centuries, were in fact, if not in form, consociated. The principles of Consociation were recognised, in the Platform, and in their deliberate judgment were supported by the word of God.

In 1716, Dr. Increase Mather published his "Disquisition concerning Ecclesiastical Councils." It does not appear that he approved these proposals. Yet so far was he, from being "disaffected to the Consociation of Churches, in order to the preservation of the faith and order of the gospel" among them, that, he expressly declares, he considers such a measure "not only lawful, but *absolutely necessary* for the establishment of the churches"—that "light of natural reason, as well as scripture, teaches churches in common with other societies, to associate and combine for their common safety"—that, "this was practised in the primitive times of Christianity, and by most of the reformed churches, at that time existing in Europe"—and that "a due attendance to the communion and consociation of churches, will, by the blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ, be a good means to prevent degeneracy and to establish them in that holy faith and order of the gospel which has been professed and practised among them; and by

pose another with an *endless confusion*, more proper for a *Babel* than a *city of God*." It was hence "thought that *prudence* called for a more effectual provision."\*

\* *Ratio Disciplinae*, p. 183.

which the religious people in New-England have been distinguished."—He concludes by recommending the Consociation of Churches, in the form submitted by your Committee, at the close of this Report, as his "dying farewell to the churches in New-England. *So will New-England remain New-England.*"

The consequences of disregarding this sound advice, have been witnessed in the state of the churches in Massachusetts for a century past, and are apparent in their present state. No man can survey the Christian ministry and churches in this Commonwealth, without deep solicitude and grief. Comparing our religious state with the standard set before us in the word of God, or in the example of the early churches of New-England, we can hardly refrain from exclaiming, "How is the gold become dim!" Doubtless the grand cause of the disordered state of the churches is, generally speaking, the want of growing personal holiness.

Your Committee consider it their special duty to call the attention of the General Association to *those evils in our ecclesiastical state, which affect churches and ministers in their publick character and in their relation to each other.*

That churches and pastors of churches do in fact sustain an important relation to each other, and also what the nature of that relation is, must be clear to every man, who duly considers, that they are all members of one kingdom, and subject to the authority of one King; that they are all partakers of one Spirit, and enlisted into one and the same cause; and that they are frequently called, in discharge of their duty, to promote a common interest. The relation existing among churches and ministers was constituted by God himself, and cannot be set aside, without opposing divine wisdom, and taking away the very foundation of christian society.

The principle of *ministerial and church fellowship* must be considered as of prime consequence, and it is obviously from a growing disregard of this principle, that the various evils, of which we complain, have resulted,—not that the principle of fellowship has been openly disavowed; for it is expressly recognised in our PLATFORM, and would certainly have been more largely insisted upon and more clearly defined, had there been the same occasion for it, that there is now. This principle is also tacitly allowed in many of our ecclesiastical proceedings. But it is, to a great extent, *practically disregarded*. It is not generally understood what the fellowship of ministers and churches is, or what are the reciprocal rights and obligations implied in it. These rights and obligations are no where clearly explained, and by men seriously contemplated. Indeed, with the exception of a few things which occasionally occur, and which appear like remaining fragments of a system once in existence, the sacred principle of fellowship among the churches is overlooked and forgotten.

But there are several particular evils in the present state of our ecclesiastical affairs, which demand distinct consideration.

The *first* is, *a prevailing neglect of discipline towards offending members of churches, and the difficulty of going through a regular course of discipline, when attempted.*

The principal thing which we shall state, as having a tendency to increase and perpetuate this evil, is *the abandonment of the sacred principle of fellowship among the churches.* In maintaining faithful disci-



pline over its members, every church needs the united support of other churches. Their relation to the individual church ought in this case to be perfectly visible, and their determination and influence in favour of strict discipline to be known and felt by all. Were it so, the offender, who might be disposed to be discontented and refractory, seeing that he could obtain no countenance from abroad, would find it necessary to submit; and thus, in a multitude of cases, difficulty would be prevented and church order established.

But in the present disjointed state of things, an offender, who grows impatient of restraint, and desirous to get rid of wholesome discipline, is able to obtain, from some quarter, the support he wishes, and thus entirely to elude the authority of the church, or to create endless difficulty and disorder.

The abandonment of the principle of fellowship among the churches has promoted the evil abovementioned, by preventing a general agreement in the mode of discipline. At present there is no uniform system of rules to govern the conduct of churches. The Cambridge Platform, though an able and useful treatise, is not adopted and used as a manual of discipline in our churches. Indeed, though we should be among the first to plead for the general soundness of the principles contained in the Platform, we doubt whether those principles are exhibited in so precise and particular a manner, as the present state of things would require. Let the churches then, in the exercise of their own rights, carefully survey their disordered and exposed condition. Let them deliberate; let them consult; and upon the scriptural principles laid down in our Platform, let them agree to adopt a uniform system of rules for the regulation of church discipline.

Such a course as we have taken the liberty to suggest has often been pursued in civil affairs. The growing experience of states and nations has showed the necessity of erecting upon the basis of the Constitution first adopted a more perfect scheme of government,—of stating more explicitly what was in any measure equivocal,—of correcting new constructions,—of multiplying statutes suited to new exigencies,—and especially of pursuing measures, before unthought of, to carry into effect original provisions.

Whatever may be said in commendation of the Platform, it has long since ceased to be of general practical use. Its provisions are not carried into effect. By our churches at large, it is not regarded as of any consideration. It is then perfectly evident, that there is no agreement among our churches in a system of discipline.

The want of such agreement in a system of discipline has been the natural consequence of our abandoning the general principle of fellowship among the churches; and has contributed much to the prostration of christian order and government. Many members of churches, and some pastors of but little experience, are doubtful what to do. And if they venture to act, they are in danger of taking a course, which will give great advantage to delinquents, and impede the efficacy of the most faithful exertions.

*Secondly.* In the present state of things, *there is no regular and acknowledged method in which congregational churches can exercise a christian watch and care over each other.* A church, as well as an individual member, may apostatize from the common faith, and fall into disorders totally incompatible with the christian character. If such be the

fact with any church, can other churches in fellowship be indifferent?—But what shall they do?—If, without seeing evidence of repentance, they continue their fellowship, they give countenance to disorder. On the other hand, if, before investigating the grounds of dissatisfaction and taking proper measures to reclaim the offending church, they withhold communion, they offer violence to the common principles of fellowship and decorum. Clearly, nothing can with propriety be done, without an investigation. It is the duty of a church, in every such case, to submit to an investigation, and be ready to give reasonable satisfaction. A refusal to do this would be to renounce all fellowship. But what church in Massachusetts now practically claims the right to *ask*, or recognizes the obligation to *give* satisfaction. So distracted is the state of our ecclesiastical affairs, and so vague, and loose, and weak the principle of union, that churches in our fellowship may go to the greatest length of apostasy, without any inspection, and without losing that indefinite fellowship with us, which they before enjoyed.

Is it said, that an apostate church does expose itself to animadversion, and ought to be treated accordingly? Granted. But *upon what principle?* and *according to what acknowledged rule?* In the present posture of our ecclesiastical affairs, there can be no regular investigation of the case. Have we then a right to withhold fellowship from a church at our option, by a sovereign vote, and thus, perhaps without just cause, to wound its sensibilities and stigmatize its reputation? What a baneful influence would such a principle have? What ecclesiastical despotism and anarchy would it introduce?

Nothing seems calculated to secure us against these difficulties, but *an explicit acknowledgment of mutual responsibility among the churches, and a definite statement, in which all churches in fellowship with each other shall agree, of their reciprocal rights and obligations, and of the exact manner in which those rights shall be exercised and those obligations fulfilled.* But at present, there is no explicit acknowledgment of mutual responsibility, and no definite, intelligible statement of reciprocal rights and duties, or of the method of intercourse. Here, as in the case above-mentioned, the Platform, which plainly exhibits the general duty of fellowship among the churches, is neither consulted nor acknowledged.

At the same time, the avowed sentiments of some, and the practical sentiments of many are such, as to exempt churches from all mutual inspection, and yet require us to have fellowship with all churches, calling themselves Congregational, whatever be their faith or conduct. And what is still more insufferable, we are under a kind of necessity of allowing our disorderly members to call in churches, the most defective in christian character, to censure our principles, to overturn our internal discipline, to sanction disorder and heresy, and to attack the reputation of faithful ministers.

These considerations clearly show that the principles of fellowship among the churches which are laid down in our Platform, are of vast importance, and must be carried into effect, before peace and prosperity can be found in our Zion. But there is no prospect of carrying those principles into effect without a great and united effort. The churches must deliberate, and act. On the basis of the principles asserted in the Platform, let them jointly settle a plan that shall be regular and practicable, of ascertaining the character of those churches with

which we are to be connected, of avoiding those which are corrupt, and of counselling and admonishing sister churches as occasion may require.

*Thirdly.* There is one more evil in our ecclesiastical affairs, which we think it necessary distinctly to notice, that is, *the want of a settled and effectual method of calling ministers to account for immorality and error, and of protecting them against calumny and injustice.* There is no reason why a minister should not be as subject to inspection as a private christian. Nay, the publicity and importance of his office, furnish special reasons, why he should enjoy the advantage of the most vigilant and faithful inspection. The body of men, who are to exercise this inspection, should be well known, their rights and duties well defined, and every thing relative to the mode of proceeding be, by common agreement, fully determined. The venerable authors of the Platform provided, though in terms not sufficiently definite for present use, for calling ministers to account before an ecclesiastical Council; and various publick documents show, that they themselves and other men of like spirit began soon after to feel the necessity of further and more effectual provisions, and proceeded distinctly to propose them. But the provisions of the Platform, and those afterwards proposed are disregarded, and by most men forgotten.

The defects of the system which actually prevails relative to the discipline of ministers are too palpable to escape notice, or to need particular explanation. We have, in the first place, no effectual means of keeping corrupt or incompetent men from entering into the ministry and obtaining ordination. Suppose the friends of ecclesiastical order are sometimes admitted to a place in ordaining councils. What influence can they have, when there is a majority in number, determined to outvote them? The rights of conscience, which they think it their duty to exercise, are assaulted, and they are, of a truth, expected to take it for granted, as a self-evident proposition, that the candidate for the sacred office is well qualified, and to give their voice for his ordination, without being indulged with an opportunity even of *seeking* satisfaction as to his fitness for the work.

After a man is once ordained, by whomsoever, and by what means soever it may have been done, we are all required to acknowledge and treat him as a minister of the gospel. If we are stationed in his vicinity, we are exposed to special difficulty. For while we are deprived of any influence in his settlement, and are utterly unable in any way to impeach his character, or bring him to trial for any fault, however flagrant, we are, according to common expectation, to have fellowship with him more frequently and in a higher degree, than others. Things proceeding in this way, a corrupt church with an heretical minister, has opportunity to exert a corrupting influence upon the whole body of Congregational churches. The great evil here complained of is at present protected, and suffered to spread, without any effort for its cure.

Heretofore it was the opinion of some in this Commonwealth, that a minister might be brought for trial before his own church. But it is very apparent, and is now almost universally conceded that a single church is not a competent tribunal for the trial of a minister. This has become so extremely evident, that whatever opinions may have been entertained, no church does really claim and exercise the right of censuring a pastor. So that we do in fact find ourselves in this difficulty, that we



have no regular, acknowledged and uniform method of trying a minister for any violation of the laws of Christ.

It is, then, of the highest moment, that a proper and effectual plan be adopted to regulate our conduct in this respect. At present, if ministers or churches refuse to hold fellowship with any one invested with the sacred office, however bad his character, they must do it on their own private responsibility, and generally to their own inconvenience. Now for this matter to be left entirely to the discretion of individuals is a great evil. For in such a case, they will be under the strongest temptations to swerve from the path of duty. And even if they are disposed to be faithful, it is probable that, by different judgments and different measures, they will embarrass each other, and increase the confusion of our ecclesiastical concerns.

It may be supposed, that the want of a regular tribunal for the trial of a minister may be supplied, and that most of the evils above insisted on may be cured, by the *provision of mutual councils*.

On this we remark, that no objection in our view can lie against the *grand principle* of mutual councils. Of the justice and importance of that principle we are fully convinced. And we wish it to be remembered, that the observations we are about to make relate, not to the *propriety* of mutual councils, but merely to the present mode of constituting them. The result, to which an attentive observation of facts, and a careful inquiry into the nature of the subject have conducted us, is this; viz. that *mutual councils, as they are now commonly constituted, are by no means an adequate provision against the evils which urgently call for a remedy.*

The general reasons of this result are the following.

1. *Mutual councils, in their present form, are not permanent bodies.* To-day they exist, and are by the churches invested with authority; to-morrow, both their authority and existence cease. Accordingly it is impossible for them to exercise any stated and continued inspection over either ministers or churches. Such occasional, transient bodies, however useful they may sometimes be in composing particular disturbances, can afford no regular and permanent support to the friends of religious order, or do any thing effectually to restrain offenders.

2. *Mutual councils, in present circumstances, may be evaded.* Offenders may refuse to join in the choice of them, or to submit to their decisions.

3. *Mutual councils have in this Commonwealth no code of ecclesiastical rules to govern either their own proceedings, or the conduct of contending parties in managing their cause.* Nor is it determined among our churches in what cases councils are to be called, nor what is the extent of their jurisdiction, or the authority of their results.

4. *Mutual councils, on the present plan, may be multiplied without limits.* Difficulties may be so managed, that there shall be no end of strife.

An *ex parte* council, resorted to as a substitute for a mutual council, is still more exceptionable. It will, from the very nature of the case, be regarded with suspicion, and can never have the power of terminating a contention. A second *ex parte* council may be called to contravene the decision of the first, and so on without end.

5. *Mutual councils, at present, are constituted in a manner extremely unfavourable to impartiality, justice, and unanimity; so that there is but little prospect of a decision which will give satisfaction to the parties.* Councils are chosen in a time of contention, when the minds of all concerned are liable to irritation, if not to bitterness. And what is more, they are chosen by the contending parties, and the offender, however exceptionable his character, and however flagrant his crimes, has an equal influence in constituting the tribunal with the other party. Doubtless he will make it his object to select men, who will be his particular friends and advocates, not those who will be judicious and impartial. Who can suppose that a council, so constituted, will be candid and thorough in their deliberations? Or how can it be expected that their decision will bear such marks of wisdom and integrity, as to prevent suspicion, and lead to an end of the controversy? As circumstances are, it is by no means strange, that a trial before a mutual council is frequently nothing but a scene of animosity and strife, in which the parties, aided by two divisions of the council, come forward to contend for victory.

The evil here complained of is like that which would be felt by civil society, if courts of justice, instead of being permanent bodies, organized in a manner wisely calculated to exclude all injustice and respect of persons, should depend for their existence and continuance, on the will of disagreeing parties, and so should in fact be the offspring of self-interest, dishonesty, and strife. In the establishment and form of courts of criminal jurisprudence, we should deem it totally inadmissible, that either the accused or the accuser should have any immediate agency. We adhere to the same equitable principle in the discipline which is exercised by a church over its own members. An offender must stand for trial before the church,—a body which has a permanent existence, and is wholly independent of his will. What mischief would be occasioned by giving him the right of choosing one half of those who should constitute a tribunal for his trial, even if he should be confined in his choice to members of the church. But the door is at present open for all these evils and many more, when offending ministers are to be tried, or difficulties arising between churches are to be brought before an ecclesiastical council.

The foregoing are the principal evils, which this committee deem it important to notice. Who does not lament their existence, and look with earnest desire for the time of their removal? Happy will it be for our churches, if, by a wise reflection on their own history from the beginning, and on events which are constantly taking place, they shall be able, through divine assistance, to obtain a remedy for the disorders which have so long afflicted them, and rise to christian purity, love, and order.

It would be unreasonable to expect, that evils, so deep-rooted and numerous, can be removed at once. But we feel a persuasion that the time has arrived for important improvements. We indulge a pleasing hope, that measures may now be commenced, which will vindicate the rights of the churches, contribute at once to a sensible melioration of our state, and effect, gradually indeed, but surely, the cure of our various disorders.

With these views, and in pursuance of an object so momentous, your Committee beg leave to submit to the consideration of this General Association the following

#### PLAN OF ECCLESIASTICAL ORDER.

There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all: and believers in Christ are all of one family, one brother-hood, one glorious and holy fellowship. Though this general fellowship, by the appointment of the adorable Head, and for great and wise purposes, is divided into particular sections; yet this arrangement is not intended to sever the unity of the Spirit, or to abate the sentiment, or hinder the exercise of mutual and extensive charity and communion: but as the individual members of each particular church are united in one body; so the particular churches should all be united in one federative and well ordered community. The vital principle of ecclesiastical order, discipline, and government is the pure spirit of generous brotherly love. It is to a defect of this spirit, that the lamented disorders, which have long abounded in our churches, and brought reproach upon Congregationalism, are chiefly to be imputed. Let this spirit become duly prevalent, and the interior discipline of the particular churches will be easy and effective, and their exterior order, in relation one to another, will be unembarrassed and irreproachable; the faithful word of the gospel will be held forth in its native purity and effulgence; and our Zion will become "beautiful as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, and terrible as an army with banners."

As however, the unity, order, peace and prosperity of a particular church is produced, preserved, and promoted, by means of an explicit covenant, formed on the principles of the gospel; so the unity, order, peace and prosperity of the great federative community of churches should in like manner, be procured, preserved and promoted, by an explicit agreement, or compact, formed on the same benign and holy principles. Something of this sort is scarcely less obviously suitable and requisite for the fellowship of the several churches, one with another, than for the mutual fellowship of the individual members in a particular church. Such an agreement or compact would constitute properly a Consociation of the churches. And such a Consociation the Platform of our churches decidedly favours; the principles for it were explicitly set forth, in distinct Propositions, adopted by the venerable Synod, composed of the elders and messengers of the churches, and holden at Boston in the year 1662. The Propositions, here referred to, are the following, which were given as a brief answer to this question, Whether according to the word of God there ought to be a Consociation of churches, and what should be the manner of it?

I. Every church, or particular congregation of visible saints in gospel-order, being furnished with a Presbytery, at least with a teaching elder, and walking together in truth and peace, hath received from the Lord Jesus full power and authority ecclesiastical within itself regularly to administer all the ordinances of Christ, and is not under any other ecclesiastical jurisdiction whatsoever. For to such a church Christ

hath given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, that, what they bind or loose on earth shall be bound or loosed in heaven, Mat. xvi. 19, and xviii. 17, 18. Elders are ordained in every Church, Acts xiv. 23; Tit. i. 5, and are therein authorized officially to administer in the word, prayer, sacraments and censures, Mat. xxviii. 19, 20; Acts vi. 4; 1 Cor. iv. 1, and v. 4, 12; Acts xx. 28; 1 Tim. v. 17, and iii. 5.—The reprovings of the church of Corinth and of the Asian churches severally imports they had power each of them within themselves, to reform the abuses that were amongst them, 1 Cor. v.; Rev. ii. 14, 20. Hence it follows that consociation of churches is not to hinder the exercise of this power, but by counsel from the word of God to direct and strengthen the same upon all just occasions.

II. The churches of Christ do stand in a sisterly relation each to other, Cant. viii. 8; being united in the same faith and order, Eph. iv. 5; Col. ii. 5, to walk by the same rule, Phil. iii. 16, in the exercise of the same ordinances for the same ends, Eph. iv. 11—13; 1 Cor. xvi. 1, under one and the same political head, the Lord Jesus Christ, Eph. i. 22, 23; and iv. 5; Rev. ii. 1; which union infers a communion suitable thereunto.

III. Communion of churches is the faithful improvement of the gifts of Christ bestowed upon them for his service and glory, and their mutual good and edification, according to capacity and opportunity, 1 Pet. iv. 10, 11; 1 Cor. xiv. 4, 7, and x. 24; 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22; Cant. viii. 9; Rom. i. 15; Gal. vi. 10.

IV. Acts of communion of churches are such as these :

1. Hearty care and prayer one for another, 2 Cor. xi. 28; Cant. viii. 3; Rom. i. 9; Col. i. 9; Eph. vi. 18.

2. To afford relief by communication of their gifts in temporal or spiritual necessities, Rom. xv. 26, 27; Acts xi. 22, 29; 2 Cor. viii. 1, 4, 14.

3. To maintain unity and peace by giving account one to another of their publick actions, when it is orderly desired, Acts xi. 2—4, 18; Josh. xxii. 13, 21, 30; 1 Cor. x. 32; and to strengthen one another in their regular administrations; as in special by a concurrent testimony against persons justly censured, Acts xv. 41, and xvi. 4, 5; 2 Tim. iv. 15; 2 Thess. iii. 14.

4. To seek and to accept help from and give help unto each other.

1. In case of divisions and contentions whereby the peace of any church is disturbed, Acts xv. 2.

2. In matters of more than ordinary importance, Prov. xxiv. 16, and xv. 22, as ordination, translation, and deposition of elders and such like, 1 Tim. v. 22.

3. In doubtful and difficult questions and controversies, doctrinal or practical, that may arise, Acts xv. 2, 6.

4. For the rectifying mal-administrations, and healing of errors and scandals, that are unhealed among themselves, 3 John, ver. 9, 10; 2 Cor. ii. 6, 11; 1 Cor. xv.; Rev. ii. 14—16; 2 Cor. xii. 20, 21, and xiii. 2. Churches *now* have need of like help as well as churches then. Christ's care is still for whole churches as well as for particular persons; and Apostles being now ceased, there remains the duty of brotherly love, and mutual care and helpfulness incumbent on churches, especially elders for that end.



5. In love and faithfulness to take notice of the troubles and difficulties, errors and scandals of another church, and to administer help (when the case manifestly calls for it) though they should so neglect their own good and duty as not to seek it, *Exod. xxiii. 4, 5; Prov. xxiv. 11, 12.*

6. To admonish one another when there is need and cause for it, and after due means with patience used, to withdraw from a church or peccant party therein, obstinately persisting in error or scandal, as in the Platform of discipline, (chap. 5, sect. 2, particularly 3,) is more at large declared, *Gal. ii. 11, 14; 2 Thess. iii. 6; Rom. xvi. 17.*

V. Consociation of churches is their mutual and solemn agreement to exercise communion in such acts, as aforesaid, amongst themselves, with special reference to those churches, which by providence are planted in a convenient vicinity, though with liberty reserved without offence, to make use of others, as the nature of the case, or the advantage of opportunity may lead thereunto.

VI. The churches of Christ in this country having so good opportunity for it, it is meet to be commended to them, as their duty thus to consociate. For 1. Communion of churches being commanded, and consociation being but an agreement to practise it, this must needs be a duty also, *Psal. cxix. 106; Nehem. x. 23, 29.*

2. Paul an Apostle sought with much labour the conference, concurrence and right hand of fellowship of other Apostles; and ordinary elders and churches have not less need each of other, to prevent their running in vain, *Gal. ii. 2, 6, 9.*

3. Those general scripture rules teaching the need and use of counsel and help in weighty cases, concern all societies and politicks, ecclesiastical as well as civil, *Prov. xi. 14, and xv. 22, and xx. 18, and xxiv. 6; Eccl. iv. 9, 10, 12.*

4. The pattern in *Acts xv.* holds forth a warrant for councils, which may be greater or lesser as the matter shall require.

5. Concurrence and communion of churches in gospel times is not obscurely held forth in *Isa. xix. 23—25; Zeph. iii. 9; 1 Cor. xi. 16, and xiv. 32, 36.*

6. There hath constantly been in these churches a profession of communion in giving the right hand of fellowship at the gathering of churches, and ordination of elders; which importeth a consociation, and obligeth to the practice thereof. Without which we should also want an expedient and sufficient cure for emergent church difficulties and differences; with the want whereof our way is charged, but unjustly, if this part of the doctrine thereof were duly practised.

The principles of these Propositions are genuinely Congregational, and perfectly coincident, and for substance, identical with those of the Platform. The Propositions, indeed, were framed and adopted by those venerable Fathers of our churches, by whom, only fourteen years before, the Platform was formed and adopted, and for the very purpose of carrying the design of the Platform into more complete and salutary effect. They are therefore especially suitable to be adopted as the general basis of an actual Consociation, as a Consociation founded upon them, and consistent with them, can be no innovation; but a recurrence to first principles, a restoration of our churches to their primitive order, and a guarantee to them of their original rights, liberties, and privileges. To carry these principles into good effect, nothing

more seems necessary, than for the churches explicitly to adopt, and duly to put in practice the following articles of Agreement.

Art. 1. The Propositions of the Synod of 1662, recited in the foregoing preamble, are acknowledged as the general basis of Consociation; and as declaratory of the rights and privileges guaranteed to the churches; of the duties which they owe to each other, and of the purposes for which they are consociated. It will therefore be understood that it will not be competent to the Consociation "to hinder the exercise of the power" delegated by Christ to each particular church in regard to its own interior administrations and concerns, "but by counsel from the word of God to direct and strengthen the same upon all just occasions:" and especially to direct and strengthen that holy fellowship which the holy churches, as churches, are to maintain and exercise one towards another.

Art. 2. Particular Consociations shall be formed within such limits as may be deemed most convenient and expedient. But though it may be the duty of every church to join in Consociation, and to do what it can to promote the great design of general fellowship and order; yet no church can rightfully be considered or treated as belonging to a consociation without its own voluntary consent, or restrained from regularly withdrawing itself from a consociation whenever it shall see fit to withdraw.

Art. 3. Of the churches comprised in each particular Consociation, the pastors, and lay delegates, will meet annually, and oftener as shall be agreed upon, or as special occasion may require; attend to any business which may regularly come before them, and upon such religious exercises as shall be judged expedient; and allow freedom of conference, in the spirit of clarity and order, upon subjects relating to the welfare of the churches.

Art. 4. Each particular Consociation will have a Moderator and a Scribe chosen annually, and to continue in office until others are chosen; and such other officers as shall be deemed requisite.

Art. 5. Although in order to general union and harmony, this instrument is to be the constitution of all the Consociations to be comprised in the General body; yet it will be competent for each Consociation to adopt, for the regulation of its own proceedings, and for the direction and benefit of the churches in regard to their consociated state, such rules and prescripts not repugnant to this constitution, as it shall judge advisable.

Art. 6. With a view to prevent the animosities, difficulties, and disorders, which have too often been experienced, in regard to councils, on occasions of dissensions and strife, and to preserve and promote that holy and pleasant fellowship, which is the primary object of consociation, and which should be sought with the most heedful attention, and the most tender care; the consociated churches with their pastors, agree to regard and use the Particular Consociation to which they belong, as the proper Council, made mutual by this agreement, as to all parties concerned, to be applied to by the churches and individuals in the connexion, in all cases, in which the advice and assistance of a council is requisite. Particularly do they agree to hold this as the proper body to hear and decide upon any complaint or allegation, touching ministerial character, against any minister belonging to it; to acquit, or to find guilty—to advise, sustain, or depose, as the case

may require.—It is to be understood, however, that any Particular Consociation may provide, upon principles and for reasons distinctly to be made known by them for cases, in which it may not be expedient for all the members to be concerned, as also for cases in which it may be proper for others, not of its body, to be admitted to sit in the council.

Art. 7. Any regular application from a church, for the advice or assistance of the Consociation, shall receive kind and prompt attention. An application from an individual, or individuals, will also be kindly attended to, though not without the most guarded respect to the rights and privileges, the order and peace of the church or churches concerned.

Art. 8. A complaint against a minister may be regularly exhibited either by the church of which he is pastor, or by a brother minister of the Consociation: but no complaint or accusation shall be received, but “before two or three witnesses.”

Art. 9. In all cases, the judgment of the Consociation is to be regarded and treated with great respect by the churches; and if, in any case, a church after due time taken for consideration, see cause to dissent, the reasons for dissenting shall be clearly and in a Christian manner, stated in writing to the Consociation; and the Consociation, having deliberately, and in the spirit of meekness, considered the reasons, will act as the case may require; either reversing the former judgment; or, if it be affirmed, yet with charity and forbearance, either allowing the church quietly to act agreeably to its own ultimate judgment,—or reviewing the case in union with one or two neighbouring Consociations to be convened together, in whole or by delegation; or dealing with the church in the way of Christian admonition. But it is distinctly provided, that no consociated church shall be put out of communion, unless, after a first and second admonition duly administered, and after due time allowed for it to reform or to justify itself, it shall be solemnly and deliberately adjudged by the Consociation to have forfeited its rights as a sister church.

Art. 10. A church, or a minister, considering itself, or himself, as aggrieved, will have the right of an appeal from the Consociation, to two or three other Consociations, to be convened, as provided for, in the next preceding article. Private church members are not included in this article; because the cases of private members are cognizable by the Consociation, only in so far as the churches to which they belong are implicated.

This Committee would farther suggest to the General Association the propriety of the following recommendation; viz. that when two or more Consociations are formed, measures be taken to promote such an understanding and consultation between them as will secure, as far as possible, a coincidence and uniformity with regard to the exercise and discipline, and all their modes of proceeding in their respective connexions.

Signed,

per order,

JEDIDIAH MORSE, *Chairman.*



## PREFACE.

TO THE REVEREND JOSEPH LYMAN, D. D.

MODERATOR OF A BODY, STYLING ITSELF "THE GENERAL ASSOCIATION  
OF MASSACHUSETTS PROPER."

REVEREND SIR,

No apology can be required for the liberty, which I take, of introducing your name to the publick in connexion with this solemn and interesting inquiry, because it appears by the proceedings of the association, of which you was moderator, that the subject of this essay was explicitly recommended to publick attention, with a very distinct intimation, that that body would proceed upon its own authority alone, to act definitively upon the subject at its next annual meeting. Unprecedented as may be this mode of legislation, in one of the most important concerns, which can affect society, it will appear to be the course contemplated by your learned and venerable association, by the following vote of that body, published by your order in the Panoplist of August last.

" Voted, to go into a free discussion of the subject of the  
" following motion—' That the report of the committee ap-  
" pointed to inquire into the history of an original MS. doc-  
" ument, &c. &c. be printed, and copies sent to the several  
" associations in *our connexion* for the purpose of *ascertain-*  
" *ing the publick sentiments* respecting the plan of ecclesi-

“astical order therein presented, and that *the subject be called up at the next meeting of the general association.*”  
 “After discussion the motion was passed into a vote, and  
 “Messrs. Morse, Codman, and Woods, appointed a committee for publishing the abovementioned report, with instructions to print it in connexion with the preceding  
 “vote.”

It is obvious, that there is an appeal to the people on this topick, and it would be indecorous in them to disregard it. But although you, Sir, and your brethren of the association may comprehend fully the subject and ultimate bearings of that report, yet the above notice and vote will convey a very imperfect idea of it to the people at large, who have not the privilege of seeing the *Panoplist*.

I shall therefore take the liberty to state generally what you, Sir, know to be true, and what I shall prove such in the course of my inquiry, that this report contains a project no less solemn and important, than that of abolishing in whole the old constitution, under which the Congregational churches have prospered during the last one hundred and sixty years, and of substituting in its place, a new system of problematical merit in itself, and directly opposed to the constitution of this state, if not subversive of the rights and liberties of the Congregational churches.

If such an important measure had been by any serious Christians deemed necessary for the cause of Christianity, it is difficult to perceive any reasons why it should have been introduced in a manner so exceptionable. There has always existed a body in this state, of which you, Sir, and all your associates are members, familiar to the people, venerable from its antiquity, catholic in its organization, embracing all the Congregational clergy, and entitled to the respect of all congregationalists—the Convention of Congregational ministers. It does not readily occur to us, why a certain

portion of the Congregational clergy, in contempt of the known opinions of this ancient and venerable assembly, should propose an entire new code of ecclesiastical discipline of their own authority, unless it arises from the conviction, that such a measure would be, as it has been, rejected by that body.

The right of those, who think themselves more pure than their brethren, to separate, and form new associations, cannot be questioned ; nor shall we deny to them the pretext of all innovators, that of reforming, rather than changing ; but they must permit us to doubt the expediency as well as consistency of such conduct in men, whose professed object is union.

If the ancient councils of the church are to be considered as any authority, (as it seems much reliance is placed on some of their dogmas, in matters of faith,) it is to be regretted, that in this instance their example had not been followed. To them were invited prelates of all opinions, without distinction, unless when for fraudulent or ambitious purposes a selected council, like a packed jury, was summoned.

In what manner even your *partial* associations have been constituted we are not advised. Whether in violation of the constitution, the Church members alone have ventured to elect and instruct delegates on these weighty affairs, or whether the whole society, at meetings duly warned, deputed their pastors to represent them ; or whether, as some people have said, I hope untruly, the ministers alone have undertaken to form an association and to assume such powers, I am equally ignorant. It is however apparent by the vote above cited, that although you profess, Sir, to call for the publick sentiments, yet you restrict this appeal to the "several associations in your connexion." Whether

you think that *they alone* have a right to express any opinions or entertain any sentiments respecting it, or whether you consider the separation already effected, and the new Church already organized, we are not informed.

If your object be simply to form a new system of Church government for that limited portion of the congregational churches who are represented in your body, it is in effect and should be entitled "A scheme for effecting the secession of certain churches from the old Congregational church, and the establishment of a new form of church government for the seceders, under the title of the Massachusetts Grand Association."

You would do well to consider whether your plan will have the smallest practical operation. Whether it can restrain "heresy," prevent the settlement of "corrupt heretical ministers" protect the orthodox clergy from "slander" and promote "union" in the church; all which objects are professed by your committee.

If the courts of law cannot uphold you; if a restless advocate for religious freedom, a friend to the old independent form of government, should appeal from your consociation to a mutual council, and the offer of such council should be rejected; if he, with his associates, should then proceed to appoint an *ex parte* council, and they should recommend the dissolution of the compact between the minister and his parish, and if this man should have sufficient influence to procure a majority of the legal voters in the parish for a dismissal, and if in such a case the court should hold the pastor regularly dismissed, which they most unquestionably will do, what will become of the consociations?

They may thunder out their anathemas in vain. They will be like those which the Pope issued against Henry the VIII. the object of contempt and ridicule. Of what benefit then, reverend Sir, can be this attempt to in-

novate in the church? Is it politick to discover the will, when it is morally certain, that you will not have the power to tyrannize?

I confess to you, Sir, I can perceive in this measure only the germ of new and scandalous dissensions, afflictive and disgraceful to the Church of Christ. The old associations will be brought into constant collision with the new, and being sustained by truth, the constitution and the laws, they will inevitably triumph. However your devotees may be kept some time in ignorance, they will finally understand their rights, and on the first cause of offence they will fly off and appeal to the old associations.

I am happy in addressing this preface to a man whom I would fain believe, from his character, to be incapable of abetting the designs of the projectors of this scheme. However ardent you may be in the support of your principles, I cannot bring myself to think, that you would promote a measure inconsistent with the great principles of the constitution, subversive of the religious liberties of the people, and tending directly to the most dreadful anarchy in the Church.

A LAYMAN.



## AN INQUIRY, &c.

IN pursuing the proposed inquiry, I shall principally address my remarks to Laymen, who constitute the great mass of society.

Whatever may be the benefits, or evils, of the proposed change, the layman must principally feel them. It is for the interest of the great body of the people, that all religious establishments are formed, and they ought to have for their object the happiness, temporal and eternal, of laymen. The Clergy are but the Angels or Ministers of God to make known and spread his revelations, and all the institutions of religion have respect rather to those who are to be taught, than those who are the teachers.

In this age, it will be readily admitted, that any project whose tendency is only to aggrandize the Clerical order, without promoting, in a correspondent degree, piety and virtue among the people, should be the object of distrust and jealousy.

Any system, which tends to restore those hierarchical establishments which were calculated to exalt the clergy, who ought only to be the instructors of their brethren, over the laity ; establishments, which retained the Christian world, for so many ages, in a state of servitude to the privileged orders of the Clergy ; must be injurious to true religion.

It cost the lives of some millions of men to vindicate the rights of conscience, and to free the Christian community from the shackles by which it had been so long restrained.

Experience has taught us, that no men abuse power more readily than Ecclesiasticks. It is probably owing even to their virtues in excess. Secluded in some degree by their functions from the common intercourse of the world, accustomed to consider their offices and doctrines of paramount importance, feeling an accountability to God, and therefore holding in small estimation the esteem and opinions of their fellow men ; yet, liable like other men to passions and frailties, from which their purity and principles cannot effectually guard them, they have in all ages mistaken, and from the constitution of human nature they probably will for ever continue to mistake, their own prejudices and opinions, their passions and even their vices, for inspiration and duty. Hence they have been often seen in the name of a just and benevolent God, and under the pretence of promoting the cause of true religion, to adopt such principles, and to exercise such intolerant and despotick powers, as no men, acting from less honourable motives, would have dared to attempt.

Yes. There are no crimes which can be compared to those, which a mistaken view of Religion has induced men to commit.

This truth, which every page of history for many centuries confirms, and which so far from derogating from the truth and weight of the Christian system, serves only to confirm it ; since it has successfully withstood these injuries of its friends, more fatal than those which its enemies could have inflicted : this important truth seems now to be generally acknowledged in the civilized world, and the effect of it has been to control as far as possible the power of the clergy, leaving to them only, undisturbed, their rightful province, that of Instructors and Teachers.

In this country the experiment has been fairly made. We have seen a body of Christian instructors, who have for



nearly two centuries, gone in and out before their people with no other power or influence, than what they have derived from the purity and sanctity of their lives, and the weight and importance of the doctrines which they taught.

Where is the man who will have the hardihood to say, that this people, (I allude to those portions of the country which have enjoyed a stated ministry ;) where is the man who will affirm, that the moral and religious habits of our country are not superiour to those of any nation in which the Clergy enjoy the dangerous powers which Dr. Morse, in his report, recommends the Clergy to seize and exercise ?

Shall we then, with all this experience in favour of our system, consent to exchange it for one, in which the most busy and intriguing, the restless, factious and ambitious among the clergy shall have a right to settle the articles of faith ; determine who shall, and who shall not be ordained, “ find guilty, sustain, and depose ?”

Such alarming powers are in fact proposed, not for adoption by the people, but for assumption by the New Massachusetts Association.

The legality of such an assumption is the principal object of my Inquiry. It is no less solemn a question, than whether on the most important of all subjects, the People *have, or have not any rights* ; or whether the clergy have a right to assume the power of dictating to them, not only in matters of faith and discipline, but in the election and deposition of their pastors.

I shall divide this essay into Chapters, for the more convenient examination of the various branches of the subject.

CHAPTER 1st. *The principles and practice of our ancestors in this country on this subject.*

*In Chapter 2d, I shall consider, what authority can be found for these extraordinary powers, this ecclesiastical jurisdiction proposed by Dr. Morse, in the history of the Early Church.*

CHAPTER 3. *The professed motives for abolishing the Cambridge Platform, and substituting this coercive system in its place.*

CHAPTER 4. *The real but secret motives for this innovation.*

CHAPTER 5. *What are the rights of the People of Massachusetts with regard to Religious establishments, as fixed by the Constitution, and by Judicial decisions.*



## CHAPTER I.

*The Principles and Practice of our Ancestors on this Subject.*

THE origin of Congregational, or, as they were at first called, Independent Churches, is too recent to admit of controversy. We have no occasion to resort to learned divines or doctors to settle this point. History has within this period too much certainty ; there have been too many rival writers, and the documents are too well preserved, to leave any doubt upon so plain a question.

When the English Church was separated from the Romish communion, it retained all the features of the hierarchy, as to the external government of the Church.

The king at first claimed to be the Spiritual head, and exercised as oppressive and despotick a power as that which the successors of St. Peter had done. It is difficult to ascertain, with the aid of the best historians, and the authentick documents of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, whether this religious despotism, or the tyrannical

measures of the Tudor and Stuart families contributed most to the disturbances which convulsed Great Britain during those ages. It is however certain, that the ecclesiastical usurpations naturally co-operated with other oppressions in producing the civil wars, and were almost the sole cause of the glorious revolution in 1688.

The first efforts against the hierarchy were made by the Presbyterians. This sect, like most reformers, and innovators, did not content themselves with abolishing the hierarchy, but like the dissenters from the Romish Church, they were so much under the influence of their early prejudices, that they could form no ideas of tolerance in religion. They considered not only that truth must be single, but that the Church had an exclusive right to interpret the scriptures, and prescribe what is 'Truth, and how and what men should believe.

They adopted precisely the error which had led to all the usurpations of the Church of Rome. As the Church of England, at its separation from the Romish see, had presumptuously arrogated to itself all the powers of which it had stripped the Roman Pontiff, under pretence that they were unscriptural; so the Presbyterians, in their turn, who derived both their hostility to the hierarchy and their intolerant principles from the Scottish covenanters, insisted upon the same *Jus divinum* in favour of their upstart Presbytery, and imposed fetters as galling as Gregory the VIII. in the summit of his power, would have dared to impose.

But the English nation was in a state of ferment too great to submit to such servitude. They felt, as we now feel, that if they must be subjected in matters of conscience to human arrogance and power, they should prefer an authority more distant, more venerable by its antiquity, more learned, more impartial, than that of the Plebeian

Presbyters who had deposed the Prelates only to tyrannize in their stead.

A new sect arose, first under the name of Brownists; which denomination becoming unpopular, they assumed that of Independents, and when they emigrated to this country, they adopted the more unexceptionable and less odious name of Congregationalists.

That this sect were the founders of the Congregational Churches in New-England, will not be disputed. Their characters and principles are the theme of daily panegyrick, by the same persons who are now about to destroy that part of their fabrick which was most worthy of commendation, I mean the entire equality and independence of the Churches.

These sectaries, the founders of our Churches, denied all Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction. They maintained the perfect equality as well as independence of all the Churches. They had, at first, no associations of any kind. When the Church of England was restored, and they became again the subjects of persecution, they fled to this country, hoping they might find in the wilderness, what Europe would not afford them, an entire and absolute freedom of Religious opinion.

But it is not in human nature to be free from ambition, nor even to be consistent always with one's own principles. Among these strenuous asserters of Christian freedom, there soon arose, as there will ever arise, ambitious and intriguing divines. These persecuted men became persecutors, and their conduct towards the Quakers, in the early settlement of this country, is a blot which can never be effaced.

God of his infinite mercy grant, that we may not leave a blot of a still deeper dye, by the adoption of the proposed system, in direct opposition to the principles of our Church!

Soon after the settlement of our country, a synod, composed of clergy and laity, established, not a system of Church Government, for that their principles rejected, but an harmonious plan of settling differences in the Church. This is well known by the name of the Cambridge Platform; and so wisely and judiciously was it framed, that it has survived all our civil convulsions, our municipal and political revolutions. This plan bears no analogy to the different schemes of Ecclesiastical tyranny, which ambition and cunning have introduced, and which ignorance and superstition have permitted. Its authority is chiefly moral. It has scarcely any sanctions but sentiment and opinion. Its powers are purely advisory. It provides for a mutual council in case of differences between a pastor and his people. This is simply an arbitration justificatory, but not obligatory. It settles the point of *character*. It gives the Pastor a right to go, or the People to dismiss, without violating the proper duties and relations of Christians to each other. In case of a refusal of a mutual council, the party complaining may elect a council *ex parte*, that is, without the other. *The result* of this last council (for our ancestors were too jealous of power to call it a decree) is merely recommendatory. It dissolves no ties. It can impose no penalties. It can neither sustain or depose. Every thing is still referred back to the source of all power, the People of the Parish. If neither party should adopt the advice of the Council, it is a mere dead letter. For example,

If a Parish should have complained against a Pastor for heretical opinions, and the Council should decide them to be such, and therefore recommend a dismissal, still, if the Parish should afterwards be converted to the opinions of the Pastor, or should be ashamed of their illiberality in prosecuting him, his Pastoral character and rights would be undisturbed.



This is the very complaint of the persecutors. "There is no inquisition, no coercive power; and how can a Church flourish if some of the pious men have no means of gratifying their passions against their personal enemies?" Such however is the present condition of our Churches. They are in every sense independent. No human power can change this system but by violence.

It ought not however to be denied, that there have been two attempts to upset this peaceable plan of Church government.

One by Dr. Mather and others in 1706, which was not suffered to go into effect, on account of its being deemed hostile to the liberties of the Church, as he himself admits; the other by Dr. Morse, a few years since, in the convention of ministers, which was thrown out, as I am told, with pretty strong expressions of general disgust. Not discouraged, this indefatigable man, with others, finding the convention of the whole clergy unfavourable to his views, has now called a Caucus of his own party, with the design of forcing or imposing upon the people, as I conceive, an entirely new form of Church government.

Before I proceed to consider this project, which is the subject of the third chapter, I will cite one or two among fifty authorities, to shew that my description of the sentiments of the Brownists, Independents, or Congregationalists, is correct.

In the British Encyclopedia, revised in this country, and reprinted by Dobson, we have the following account of the "Brownists."

"The whole power of admitting and excluding members, with the decision of all controversies, was lodged in the brotherhood. As the vote of the brotherhood made a man a minister, and gave him authority to preach the word and administer the sacraments, so the same power

could discharge him from the office, and reduce him to a mere layman again ; and as they maintained the bounds of a church to be no greater, than what could meet together in one place, and join in one communion, so the power of their officers was prescribed within these limits ; in a word, *every church* in a Brownist model is a body corporate, having full power to do every thing which the good of the society requires, without being accountable to any classis, synod, convocation, or other *jurisdiction whatever*." "Most of their discipline has been adopted by the Independents."

Indeed, I may add, they were in fact the same church, though they altered the name on account of Brown's apostasy.

The settlers at Plymouth were Brownists, as Dr. Belknap assures us in the life of Robinson, though for the aforesaid reason they altered the name. Dr. Mosheim's account of the Brownists essentially agrees with the authority above cited. The publisher of his works states expressly that the Brownists were the founders of New England.

But a much more perfect account of the religion of our ancestors may be found in the Encyclopedia ; title, Independents.

It is there stated, that Brown was the founder of the present sect of Congregationalists, though his system was softened by his successors, of whom the chief place is given to the venerable Robinson.

That pious man's definition of a Christian Church seems to settle the question, as to the legality or propriety of associations with judicial powers, unless it is intended openly to renounce the Congregational principle. It is "*Coetum quemlibet particularem esse totam, integram, et perfectam ecclesiam ex suis partibus constantem immediate et Independentem (quoad alias ecclesias) sub ipso Christo*." "That every separate christian society is a whole, entire and per-



fect church, holding its authority (at least so far as respects other churches) immediately and independently from Christ himself."

The two following are said, by these impartial and orthodox editors, to be the distinguishing features of Congregationalism ; upon which we may exclaim, "How has the gold become dim ! !"

"1. The Independents reject the use of all creeds and confessions drawn up by fallible men, requiring of their teachers no other test of orthodoxy than a declaration of *their belief in the Gospel of Jesus*, and their adherence to the Scriptures as the rule of their faith."

This was written thirty years ago, probably by an English divine. It is a true representation of Congregationalism. At this day Dr. Porter, Mr. Channing and others, are abused for maintaining, what this learned work declares to be a distinguishing feature of Congregationalism.

The second distinctive tenet of Congregationalism is, "That they lay no stress upon the rite of ordination, according to the Episcopal or even Presbyterian forms. That a minister may be set apart and authorized to preach by any christian society."

Among the arguments, which this work recites, as used by the Congregationalists in favour of their principles, are the following, which are pertinent to our present question, and shew the unscriptural nature of Dr. Morse's new consociations. "That the word *ἐκκλησία* which we translate Church, is always used in scripture to signify either a single congregation, or the place (or building) where a single congregation meets." Sundry texts in support of this construction are then cited, and the writer proceeds to say, "Besides these, the Independents can find no other description of a church in the New Testament ; not a trace of a diocese or Presbytery consisting of several congregations subject to one jurisdiction."

“The number of disciples in Jerusalem was very great, before they were dispersed by the persecution, in which St. Paul bore so great a part, yet they are never mentioned as forming distinct assemblies, but as *one* assembly meeting in *one* place. After the dispersion, as they could never meet in *one* place, they are never called a church, or one church, but the churches of Judea, &c. Hence the Independent concludes, that in Jerusalem, church and congregation were of the same import.” In the same manner the work from which these quotations are made, proceeds to adduce the arguments of the Independents against all separate power in the elders, as distinct from the people of the congregation, and against all jurisdiction of one or more churches over each other. The arguments are very satisfactory, to which our readers are referred. It is sufficient for our purpose that we have performed what we undertook, viz. to shew, what were the principles of our ancestors in this country, the early and true Congregationalists, on this subject of Church government.

It has been proved, that the essence of Congregationalism is the perfect independence of each separate church, and the denial of any judicial authority in any body beyond or without each separate society.

To say, that you wish to promote the prosperity of the church, meaning the Congregational Churches, by adopting such a consociation as is proposed, is as absurd as it would be to say, that you are in favour of civil liberty, and a Republican government, with a despotick hereditary emperor at its head, or of Protestantism, but under absolute submission to the see of Rome.

## CHAPTER II.

*The authority for these extraordinary powers and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction, now claimed by Dr. Morse, to be found in the history of the Early Church.*

I SHALL select as competent authority on this point, Dr. MOSHEIM, because no man will deny his orthodoxy, and few will be disposed to question his learning and impartiality. It is not expedient to embarrass our brethren of the laity with numerous quotations. It will be sufficient for their satisfaction, to cite one ecclesiastical historian of undoubted credit, who refers his readers to his authorities for every assertion.

Dr. Mosheim affirms, “that neither Christ himself, nor any of his Apostles, have commanded any thing clearly and expressly concerning the external form of the church, and the precise method according to which it should be governed. From this we may infer, that the *regulation of this* was in some measure to be accommodated to the times, and left to the wisdom of “the *chief rulers of the state and church.*” —See Mosheim’s Ecclesiastical History, vol. i. p. 97.

If this proposition be true, there exists no authority in the state of Massachusetts, to establish any precise form of church government, or to give to any one church or number of churches authority over any single church. For our State rulers are expressly prohibited by the 3d article of the constitution from so doing, and as to “Chief Rulers” in the church, we have never had any in this state.

The *church* as a general term, embraces every sect of christians, whether Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Universalists or Quakers; for our laws recognise all these sects expressly as equally members of the Christian church.

Does any man deny this proposition?

Let him consider, that, by our constitution, any man is exempted from attending, or paying towards the support of any minister of any one of the aforesaid persuasions, or sects, however regularly settled in his town, provided he cannot conscientiously attend upon his ministry, and provided there be any other minister of a different persuasion, on whose ministry he does attend. This is a constitutional provision which cannot be abrogated, and which proves the absolute equality of all Christian churches.\*

To this catholick principle in our constitution and laws, there is but one exception, and that is contrary to the genius of our government, and still more so to the spirit of our religion, the exclusion of the Roman Catholics from the protection which others enjoy. That a Catholick should be obliged to support a Protestant teacher as well as his own, is a most grievous imposition.

But it may be said, that whatever the people, or the civil ruler may have done, the Scriptures are paramount to them all, and that the chief rulers of the church derive their authority from God.

It is for this reason I shall cite further passages from Dr. Mosheim, as to what the Scripture and apostolick usage have settled on these matters.

\* In the case of Mr. Murray while at Gloucester, the supreme court held, that to entitle him to recover he must be a settled minister. But what that settlement must be, and that it does not require an ordination by any presbytery, nor the aid of any other churches in that ceremony, is plain by the case of Freeman and the wardens of King's Chapel, vs. Pelham. The Reverend Dr. Freeman was ordained in a manner truly apostolick. He was set apart for the ministry by the wardens of his own church, pursuant to a vote of the whole society. What an absurdity then, to talk of the absolute necessity of a Consociation to license ministers, to settle the mode of ordinations, and to exclude improper men from the ministry!!

In connexion with the above quotation, Dr. Mosheim proceeds to say, " If however it is true, that the Apostles acted by divine inspiration, and in conformity with the commands of their blessed master, and this no Christian can call in question ; then it follows, that that form of government which the primitive Churches borrowed from that of Jerusalem, the first christian assembly established by the Apostles themselves, must be esteemed of divine authority. But from this it would be wrong to conclude, that such a form is immutable ; for this a great variety of events might render impossible.

" In those early times, every Christian Church consisted of the people, their leaders and the ministers or deacons, and these indeed belong essentially to every religious society. The *People* were undoubtedly the first in authority, for the *Apostles* showed by their own example that nothing of moment was to be carried on or determined without the consent of the assembly ; and such a method of proceeding was both prudent and necessary, in those critical times."

" It was therefore the assembly of the *People* which chose their own rulers and teachers, or received them by a free consent, when recommended by others." " The same *people* rejected or confirmed by their suffrages the laws proposed by their rulers to the assembly ; excommunicated profligate and unworthy members of the Church, restored the penitent to their privileges, passed judgment upon the different subjects of controversy and dissension that arose in their community, examined and decided the disputes which happened between the elders and deacons, and, in a word, exercised all the authority which belongs to such as are invested with sovereign power."

See Mosheim, Vol. I. p. 97, 98.



Thus, according to an orthodox Doctor of the Church, the people were in the Apostolick days the sole depositaries of sovereign power in all Church matters. The reason he assigns for this deference to the People applies with more force now, and that is, "that the People purchased this privilege by supporting the teachers, the inferiour officers and the Poor."

But how principles and practices are changed since the days of the Apostles ! By imperceptible encroachments, the people in *some* countries have been stripped of all power ; and the teachers, who were originally subject to the People, have become their masters, and keep the whole religious community in absolute subjection. Our ancestors threw off this yoke and resumed their primitive authority, that which the Apostles gave or allowed to them.

Dr. Morse, out of pure love, as he pretends, to the Church, is now preparing to slip on this yoke again. The proposed plan of Consociation annihilates the power of the people, considered as distinct from the Church, at a stroke, they not being so much as mentioned from the beginning to the termination of it.

Dr. Mosheim does not leave this question here : in page 105 of the same volume he says, "*The Churches in those early times were entirely independent, none of them subject to any foreign jurisdiction, but each one governed by its own rulers and own laws. For though the churches founded by the Apostles had this particular deference shewn to them, that they were consulted in doubtful and difficult cases ; yet they had no juridical authority, no sort of supremacy, nor the least right to exact laws for them.*" Now indeed Dr. Morse's church, though not founded by an apostle that we have ever heard of, arrogates to itself the juridical authority, a supremacy over other churches, by adopting a new constitution, by which the whole legislative and judicial power is taken from each separate church, and given to

the Consociation. I shall consider hereafter the proposed assent of each church and *its illusory character*.

Our old and venerable Congregational system was precisely like that, which Dr. Mosheim says was appointed and practised upon by the Holy Apostles. It is this which they propose to destroy.

Dr. Mosheim adds, in the same paragraph, "Nothing is more evident than the perfect equality which reigned among the primitive churches; nor does there even appear the smallest trace of that Association of provincial churches, from which councils and metropolitans derive their origin." Mosheim, Vol. i. p. 105.

Until this learned orthodox divine shall have been confuted by those who procured the publication of his works here, we may assume it as a settled proposition, that in the apostolick age, *the People*, that is, the professing christians of every distinct church and society, enjoyed and exercised all ecclesiastical powers, even those of settling questions of faith and disputes in the church, as well as of electing and dismissing their teachers—that there were no associations of churches, no councils, no claim of judicial power or supremacy in any bodies of christians.

If, then, while the apostles were upon earth, who must be supposed to have best known the will of our Saviour and the purposes of God, no such jurisdiction was ever claimed, what pretence can now exist, that such dangerous powers should be confided to fallible and erring men, stimulated by passions, uncontrolled by apostolick authority, and unaided by divine inspiration? The arguments and reasons in favour of exact conformity and uniform discipline were infinitely stronger in the apostolick age than they are at the present day.

The Church was surrounded with able, learned and powerful foes, who were ready to seize upon any dissensions as

to matters of faith or discipline, in order to bring Christianity into discredit. There existed also in that age, an authority, to which an appeal might be made, entitled to the highest respect, viz. the Apostles themselves.

Yet these luminaries of the Church gave no encouragement to the erection of general tribunals for the correction of abuses, and for the establishment of uniform rules and discipline in the Church.

If we are asked, to what sort of connexion the apostles alluded, in the frequently repeated phrases of the "fellowship of the churches," we answer, an intercourse of kindness, of hospitality, of advice ; but more especially, in that age of persecution, of notice when dangers approached, and of generous aid when persecutions prevailed.

In fact a strict and intimate intercourse of the churches might have been at that time necessary, but has now become utterly useless.

In the present day, it is difficult to see any reason why one or more churches, in combination, should exercise an authority in matters of faith and discipline over other churches. We have no longer any enemies to encounter in the European or American world. The last madman, Paine, who attacked christianity, surely did not produce any effect which would require an intimate union of the churches. The whole civilized world professes to be Christian. It is to be sure divided into an hundred sects. There is no earthly tribunal to decide which is right. If you once depart from the scriptural and apostolick principle, that each church forms an whole, and has a right to interpret the scriptures for itself, it is difficult to see any point at which you can stop, short of an universal head, the authority claimed by the Bishop of Rome. Shall we, the Independents, be ready to admit the authority of the Archbishops and convocations of Great Britain ? And if we are,

will the Baptists admit the infallibility of our Consociations ? Or will even the haughty Presbyters, though they join the orthodox in denouncing those who differ from them as hereticks, will they submit to Dr. Morse's Consociation ?

The only pretence for these tribunals is, the Papal or Romish one of conformity. But such conformity can in this case reach but one sect, the Congregationalists. The others will still go on in what we call their errors. It is not therefore the church of Christ which these gentlemen would reform and render uniform. It is a single sect ; and the only consequence would be to break that sect into two or more divisions, without effecting the object at which they aim. I trust that these reverend gentlemen are not so far gone, as to contend, that the Congregationalists alone are the church of Christ ; and that they will admit some few of the other sects to a small participation in the blessings of the gospel.

This however is not the place to press these considerations. My object in this chapter was simply to shew, as I believe I have done, that the early church admitted of none of these combinations, associations, or consociations to measure, restrain, and limit faith ; and to forge and invent causes of heresy, and of confusion and controversy, in the church. I have cited but one authority, but that is orthodox, and venerable, and published and circulated in this country by the very authors of this system, which Dr. Mosheim declares to have been unknown in the apostolick age.

If we are asked, where is the evil of such conspiracies, combinations and consociations, even if not authorized by the example of the apostles ? I answer, first, that if they are not authorized by scripture or by law, there ought to be historical and practical proofs of their utility, otherwise they ought not to be adopted.

But, 2dly. That all such associations and assumptions of power have invariably terminated in the most detestable of



all despotisms. They are in their nature an oligarchy, or government of the few. As their power is ill-founded, it can be preserved only by violence. These considerations will be more fully developed in the following pages.

### CHAPTER III.

*The avowed motives of the professed change from Congregationalism to Consociationism, (if I may be allowed to coin a new word for a new thing.)*

It could not be expected, that learned Divines would propose an entire revolution in the church, without bringing to their aid all the talents and learning of their party. It accordingly appears, that this great body had this topick under consideration for a year, and committed it to some of their most skilful scribes, to invent and digest arguments for such an innovation. We are authorised to suppose, therefore, that Dr. Morse's report contains their strongest reasons in favour of this measure: this we shall now proceed to examine.

The first remark to which this report gives rise, is the consciousness of its authors, that it could not stand upon its own merits. A manuscript of Dr. Cotton Mather is brought forward with as much parade, as if he had been an apostle. This so exceedingly resembles the monastick artifices of the dark ages, of hunting up the barbarous productions of some canonized saint, to authorize some new usurpation, or add sanctions to some ancient ones, which were not respectable in themselves, that it excites our jealousy, if not our contempt.

If our church government be in itself so radically defective, as this committee pretend, if it be that rotten, misera-



ble, and ineffectual system, which they would shew it to be, if these evils have been perceived from the days of Dr. Cotton Mather to the present time, the fact must be too well known to all the Christian societies, to require Dr. Mather's authority in support of it.

If these defects were not so generally known, and were perceptible only to the enlightened members of this association, still, if they exist, they must be susceptible of demonstration, and the duty of the committee was rather to state, and prove them, than to rely on this obsolete authority.

But the greatest difficulty is, that we can perceive no grounds for this unlimited deference to Dr. Mather. He was respectable for a very credulous age, and he partook, as largely as any man, of the imperfection of the times. But what authority ought such a man to enjoy, in a state of society, in which his works can scarcely be read without a smile at his weakness and prejudices? We have nearly one hundred times as many learned men at present, as there were in that period.

The second remark we would make on this document, which seems to be the citadel of the revolutionists, is, that the opinion of Dr. Cotton Mather, according to his own confession, had no weight with his *contemporaries*. It is true, we have the assertion of Dr. Morse, (and it is the only authority given for it,) that the convention of ministers approved the project. By what majority, and with what limitations or amendments, we are not told. It would be very much to the discredit of the convention, if it were true; and this the committee cannot deny, because they tell us, "*the proposals were such as no congregational minister could consistently recommend.*" This is no great praise to that convention.

But as one hundred years have elapsed, and Dr. Mather's project has slept as soundly as himself, it became necessary to account for this silence, and thus it is feebly and haltingly admitted by the committee, "that there were  
 " some considerable persons among the ministers, and the  
 " laity, who thought the liberties of *particular churches* to  
 " be endangered by them. In deference to these, the pro-  
 " posals were never prosecuted beyond the bounds of *mere*  
 " *proposals.*" In other words, they died a natural death. They were rejected with indignation by the clergy and laity, in 1706. This fact we have from Dr. Cotton Mather himself, in a work published twenty years afterwards.

What does this ancient precedent prove? That some men had the temerity to propose the abolition, (for it was such in effect) of the congregational form of government, and that it was rejected as fatal to the liberties of the church.

But never was any body of men so unfortunate in the choice of a committee, as our association. Not content with bringing forward a case, which, as far as it has any authority, goes to the destruction of their own principles, they make the most dreadful mistakes in the management of this unlucky case. In page 360 of the *Panoplist*, vol. xi. they say, "that the proposals of Dr. Mather are in *various respects* such, as that in their opinion, congregational ministers cannot *consistently recommend or approve* them."

This would seem to a layman, to be a *coup de grace*, a fatal blow both to Dr. Mather, and the convention which adopted his plan. It is to be regretted, that the committee had not stated the parts of Dr. Mather's project, which appeared to them so exceptionable; perhaps we should have deemed them the most meritorious.

But it is singular, we must all confess, that so much deference should be paid to a project, which the committee are constrained to censure in such severe terms.

In the next page the committee say, that they cannot determine on what grounds the proposals were rejected, and seem rather to be surprised at their hard fate. This is a little strange, and somewhat contradictory in the view of a layman.

It would occur to us as probable, that some "of the various objections which rendered it impossible for a congregational minister either to recommend or approve them," might be presumed to have occasioned their failure.

Now we appeal to all rational men, and request them to ask themselves, why this plan of Dr. Cotton Mather, so treated by the people in his *own* age, utterly neglected *since*, and finally so condemned by this committee, should be made the chief foundation for this new experiment, and should occupy two thirds of their report? Surely the committee will experience the fate denounced on those who build their *houses on the sand*. It is, in brief, presumed by the committee, that a project which had no countenance in the age in which it was produced, nor with the many generations which have succeeded it, will acquire an importance and influence from its antiquity, which its merit could not secure for it, and that we shall be disposed to adopt a plan of ecclesiastical tyranny, which our ancestors rejected with disdain.

The arguments of the committee, independent of Dr. Mather's rejected authority, may be divided into three classes, all of which we shall minutely consider.

1st. "General, loose, declamatory assumptions, or assertions, vague, indefinite, and in many cases incomprehensible." In other terms, *Panoplist language and argument*.

2d. Three specifick objections to the present plan of church government.

3dly. Scriptural arguments, taken from Dr. Increase\* Mather's Ratio Disciplinae.

As to the first, "The loose, declamatory assertions."

They are of the character of those which follow. "That there is a visible decline in the order, discipline, and fruitfulness of the churches." This complaint, they admit, was the prevailing one also in 1706, one hundred and ten years since, and has been the prevailing one with certain men, in all ages of the church. It is like the usual complaint against the seasons, the scarcity of money, and the general profligacy of the age in which we live. What peculiar evidence, or proofs the committee have on this point, we know not. We are persuaded of the contrary. This part of our country is unquestionably as correct in its morals, more disposed to support publick worship, and as well inclined to attend the exercises of religion, to respect and honour its ministers, and to promote all publick institutions for the advancement and spread of Christianity, as it has been in any former age.

The clergy are much more learned and respected than they were a century ago. The affectation of external sanctity has, it is true, given place to more natural and less pharisaical and assuming manners. Men think they can be pious without being hypocritical.

There is, in short, all the difference between this country now and at that period, that will be found in Great Britain, between that nation under Praise God Barebones' Parliament, and that same people printing and dispersing as they now do, the Holy Scriptures in one Hundred Tongues. Then to be sure, a Surplice was a subject of Horror, and a Form of Prayer, a Liturgy, "a damned work of Satan." Now we see a churchman and dissenter, an archbishop and ruling elder, combining their efforts, without dissensions or

\* Should be Cotton Mather.



difficulties, to spread the glad tidings of the Gospel throughout the habitable globe.

The second general complaint is,

“That in the introduction, discipline, and dismissal of ministers, the Churches are left each to its own discretion, without any acknowledged uniform rule to govern them.”

And pray is this an evil? Is it unreasonable, that those who support, and are bound to hear a preacher, should have a voice, and the only voice in introducing him? Is it just cause of complaint, that those who look up to their pastor as the greatest earthly blessing, who wait anxiously for him to soothe their sorrows, and strengthen their hearts on the bed of sickness, who look up to him as the guide of themselves and their children, in the narrow path to heaven—ought it to be a subject of complaint, that such a man, who is to be united to them for life, should be the object of their choice, and that their preference should not be disturbed by some rival priests, who should insist upon his subscribing to their articles of faith?

Yet this is one of the main articles of complaint. It is as unreasonable and preposterous, as if these gentlemen should assume to the Church the power of deciding who should or should not intermarry in private life.

The power thus claimed by Dr. Morse of interfering, either with the settlement or dismission of a minister, we have shewn in our first chapter, was not suggested in the Apostolick age, and in the second, we made it equally apparent, that such a power was rejected and denied by the Congregational Churches.

The Committee then call the attention of the publick most solemnly “*to the evils which affect Churches and ministers in their publick character and in their relation to each other.*”

As it has been seen, that in the Apostolick age there were no relations between one Church and another, except



those which exist between all Christians, those of kindness and urbanity, we should have expected on this head to see some elucidation of these relations and duties, as well as the manner in which they had been broken and disregarded. We look in vain. The Consociation Cause will not admit of precision, or palpable and obvious facts and statements. We have indeed much commonplace declamation, such as, "that all Churches are members of one kingdom, subject to one king, partakers of one spirit, and enlisted in the same cause, and are frequently called to promote the same interest." We are even pretty audaciously, and if any other persons were concerned, I should say pretty impiously told, that the relation existing among Churches was constituted by God himself!!

Let us examine this rhapsody which the Committee have substituted for argument. All Christendom, that is, all who believe in the Christian dispensation, belong to one spiritual kingdom, are subject to one king, and partakers of one spirit; Catholick and protestant, episcopalian and dissenter, are equally the subjects of the foregoing remarks, unless the Committee contend that the Church of England, and the Baptists and Catholicks are not Christians, and are therefore not subjects of the same king. If then these terms or phrases have any bearing (and they have but very little, for in our judgment they are mere sounds without meaning) but if they have any bearing, they go to prove the necessity of a perfect *conformity in all sects*. They draw the inference, that there should be but one Church, and one form of government for all the Christian world.

This is precisely the Roman Catholick doctrine. If one or more churches convened as in Council, Synod or Consociation have a right to settle matters of faith; if there be any human power since the Apostolick age competent to this, the pretensions of the Bishop of Rome are beyond all

limits of comparison the first. They have prescription and antiquity, and numbers on their side. They have been admitted by the Christian world, for six or seven times the number of ages that the protestant form of religion has existed. There are *plausible* grounds in scripture for his authority. There are *solid* ones in favour of submission to one despot rather than to many. The distance of his residence, his independence, his consequent impartiality, his freedom from those petty rivalships and personal passions, from which the best men more nearly in contact are not exempt, these, and a thousand other reasons, give his claim a preference to those of any human tribunal. Let it not be pretended, that I am an advocate for the authority of the see of Rome. I deny *all* ecclesiastical jurisdiction. I think conscientiously, that it is the most monstrous and wicked of all usurpations. It is sinning against all light, to assume the smallest control over the consciences of men under colour of scriptural authority. The whole scriptures are against it, and we shall see presently on what wretched foundation these pretensions repose.

If it be said, that our ancestors, the first Independents, in direct opposition to their own principles, exercised a full share of spiritual tyranny, I answer, this is a truth ever to be lamented. I was never among the admirers of our forefathers without qualification. They had indeed great virtues, but they had also great defects. And there is not a man among those who praise them, that would exchange the present state of society, for that of this country in the first century of its settlement.

Reformation is never perfect at once. Some of our weaknesses will still adhere to us, but, blessed be the God of all mercy, he has permitted us to enjoy a degree of light and liberty which our ancestors never knew, when the true spirit of the first reformation, and the better and more per-

fect principles of the second, that of the Independents, are about to have their full operation. Such an operation they will have, in the entire freedom of the separate churches, and in an universal Catholick spirit, unless it shall be disturbed by ecclesiastical tribunals ; which have, in all ages, been the bane of Christianity.

I shall now proceed to consider secondly,

The three specifick reasons, assigned by the learned committee, for abolishing the Cambridge Platform and establishing a coercive ecclesiastical court.

The first is, “a prevailing neglect of discipline towards offending members of churches, and a difficulty of going through a regular course of discipline when attempted.”

It is difficult to perceive, in what manner the proposed consociations will strengthen the power of separate churches over their own members.

It is alleged, indeed, that every church to this end requires the aid of sister churches. This is broad assertion. The only means of discipline in the power of the church, in a free country, are admonition, penance, and excommunication. These a single church can effectually exercise, or inflict, as well without as with the aid of associated churches. Indeed much better, because there is no appeal.

Something is intimated of the delinquents obtaining support from other churches. This also is mere declamation.

Why state chimerical fears ? Is it a practical evil of any extent ? Did any church ever expel a member for lewdness, or intemperance, or profanity, and has the excluded member been received and encouraged by a sister church ?

We believe, and trust, never. It is a mere pretence. But if it be intended, as it would seem, to erect these consociations to try the lay brethren who offend, if they are to examine into and decide spiritual offences, they will have labour and reward enough.

Connecticut will find a new and profitable employment for her numerous sons, and we shall be thronged with a host of theological lawyers, eager to prove their zeal and ingenuity against the reprobate citizens of Massachusetts.

This is no sneer. It is sober conviction. When we see it gravely and seriously urged, that the churches have not sufficient power to enforce ecclesiastical discipline, that a great and general court of ministers must be called to try laymen, and to punish them for heresies and other sins, we own we should shudder, if we did not believe, that the good sense and temper of our people would induce them to spurn at such a suggestion. Yet such an one *is made*, as will be seen by the prefixed report.

The second specifick objection to the old Platform is, "that there is no regular and acknowledged method in which Congregational churches can exercise a christian watch and care over each other."

"A Christian church, it is added, may *apostatize* from the common faith, and fall into disorders totally incompatible with the christian character."

Now this is very plausible to vulgar ears, but what does it mean? Is there any standard to decide *who does apostatize*? What is the common faith? Is it the faith of Roman Catholicks, or of Lutherans, or Calvinists, or Independents, or Methodists, or Baptists?

And who is to decide when a whole church *has* apostatized? And what the effect of such a decision? Who has the keys of heaven, now they are wrested from St. Peter? In what part of scripture is this power given to Dr. Morse's consociated churches, or any other self-formed ecclesiastical tribunal?

Let these gentlemen shew us one instance of consociation in the scriptures. We shall prove hereafter there are none.

Suppose this plan in operation. A case of alleged heresy is brought before this august tribunal. The members are precisely divided. Which side is right? Is the truth in doubt? What is the remedy? Call in one or two other consociations, say the committee; that is, multiply the means of confusion and discord, and you will obtain peace and truth. The new body is torn by like dissensions. What then are you to do? Appeal to the Grand Association of Massachusetts. But suppose the Grand Association should decide the case, and the refractory church should refuse to submit, what is the next measure? To withhold communion. This any separate church can *now* do, and often undertakes to do, without any other authority, than its own natural powers and rights.

This obliges me to notice a very extraordinary assertion of this committee, that for a *single* church to refuse to hold communion with another "is offering violence to decorum;" "that if a single church should refuse to hold fellowship, it would tend to introduce ecclesiastical despotism and anarchy."

What! have we forgotten the memorable case of Mr. Codman, a man of excellent feelings, but who has been, we regret to say it, induced to join this high ecclesiastical party? Was *he* guilty of "introducing despotism and anarchy?"

That gentleman was persuaded to withhold communion with many associated churches, against the will of a majority of his people. An ecclesiastical council was called. A full hearing was had, and all the orthodox clergy on the trial declared, that he had a *right* so to do.

Will it be said, that refusing to exchange with his brethren of the same association was not throwing them out of communion? It not only necessarily includes that power, but much more. It includes the right to deprive the people of his charge of their accustomed privileges.



Acts of fellowship of churches are, assisting in case of the sickness, death, or absence of a pastor, at ordinations, and in councils. Surely it is ludicrous to say, that you still hold communion and fellowship with a church, when you will not permit its pastor to perform the ordinary services of the desk, and refuse him admission to your pulpit.

The decision of the orthodox part of the council in that memorable case, has proved, that the Cambridge Platform needs no amendment on this ground, since *every* pastor has the power *against the will* of his *own people* to *withhold fellowship* with any, and all other churches, at his pleasure.

The third specifick objection of the committee to the old system of government is,

“The want of a settled effectual method of calling ministers to account for immorality and error, and of protecting them against calumny and injustice.”

This reason will be found, on examination, to be as little availing as either of the others.

The only persons, who have any interest or right to call a pastor to account, are his own parishioners.

It would be preposterous to suppose, that any parish would be so corrupt as to retain a clergyman notorious for his immorality. If such a case could be supposed, any church, in connexion with such a reprobate society, would be fully justified in withdrawing from any communion with it. As to errors, if they are such as to give offence to his own flock, there is *now* a competent remedy.

The parties aggrieved have a right to insist on a mutual council. If the members of such council are divided, the equitable presumption is, that it is *no error*; or if any, of an immaterial nature.

If either party refuses to unite in a council, the party complaining has a right to call an *ex parte* council, the result of which is so far obligatory, that the party who conceives

itself benefited by it, may legally act in conformity to it, and will be upheld by the courts of law.

But the learned committee, aware of the perfect nature of the present remedy, have endeavoured to render mutual councils, and the present mode of trial, odious and contemptible.

“We have,” say they, “no effectual mode of keeping improper men out of the ministry.” This is a departure from the question, which was, not whether improper men could be kept out, but whether they could be punished after they were admitted. But this complaint is as idle as the other. No man, by the platform, can be ordained without the approbation of a council. It is true, the parish settling a minister, may send to whatever churches it chooses. But is not this a natural privilege, and are not the powers and rights of all churches, once regularly gathered, equal?

But, says Dr. Morse, “the *friends of ecclesiastical order* are often in the *minority* at ordinations, what can they then do?” So it would seem that the *minority* are to govern, provided they are the true saints. “What influence,” the committee dolefully inquire, “what influence can they have in an ordaining council, when there is a majority determined to outvote them?”

We answer, the same which the minority always have in civil affairs. They must submit and be modest enough to wait until the minds of men shall change. This, the committee will not do. It would seem therefore, that this project is to give the minority, in certain districts, a right to control the majority. This is indeed either an ingenuous or unguarded confession, fully displaying the extent and objects of this project.

Let us now hear the legal objections to the present admirable system of mutual councils.

The committee premise, “that no objection can arise in their view to the *grand principle of mutual councils*, of

the *justice* and *importance* of that principle they are fully convinced."

This appears to us one of those extraordinary subtleties, which ought to have vanished with the pupils at St. Omers.

To be in favour of a "Grand principle, and convinced of its justice and importance," and yet proceed to decry it as absurd, irrelevant, weak, and ridiculous, is what a layman cannot comprehend.

It is not to *mutual councils*, say the committee, we object, but to the *mode* of *constituting* them ! Now the *mode* of constituting them is what renders them *mutual*, and contains their only merit.

We beg the reader not to laugh indiscreetly, when we state the mode in which *mutual* councils are proposed to be improved.

The consociation is, by a standing covenant, which may endure for several centuries, to be constituted the council, and is therefore to be *called mutual* ! ! Thus, according to the same reasoning, the Supreme Court is a *mutual* tribunal, though one party is always forced there against his consent, it is an arbitration, because by the compact, called the constitution, that tribunal was provided, and therefore the Judges are *mutually* chosen ! To such subtleties do these gentlemen descend.

Our notions of mutual councils are very different ; they are in effect references or arbitrations. Their merit or value consists in their having the direct confidence and assent of the parties. If, in questions of property, references are sometimes liable to objections, they seem, in ecclesiastical affairs, to be the only remedy which the principles of our religion admit. They are a *peace-making tribunal in their character*. Theology, and religious controversies, which seem to repel forensick accuracy, require a more popular mode of decision ; it is therefore highly proper that friends should be called in to heal the breach without scandal to

the church. The objections to them, urged by the committee, are derogatory to our clergy. They would prove, that the ministers of religion are at this day as violent, as unjust, as partial, as they were in the worst ages of the church, or as the worst men in society: that they will sacrifice their consciences and their God to their party views. Heaven forbid, that Dr. Morse's picture of them should bear any resemblance to the original. We think it a calumny, and we fully believe, that in mutual councils most clergymen will dare to be honest in spite of the strongest of all prejudices, those of religious sects.

But our principal reply to this objection is, In what manner will consociations remedy this evil? Will there be no party or sectarian prejudices within those tribunals? Will the same class of men, who are represented as so partial in mutual councils, become perfectly fair as soon as they are convened in consociations?

Or—(for here we probe this gangrened wound to the bottom,)—is it expected and intended, that the consociations shall consist *only of men of one mode of thinking*? The whole argument of the committee proceeds on this presumption.

The *first* specifick objection to mutual councils, which the committee urge, is, “that they are not permanent bodies.” This is *their excellence*. Referees are not permanent bodies, but they are the only fit tribunal for all cases affecting honour, character, conscience, and which involve those equitable considerations which the law cannot reach: Make an ecclesiastical tribunal permanent, and all history assures us, that whether it be a college of cardinals, or a kirk, a court of high commission, or an apostolick office, an inquisition or a presbytery, it will be a despotism.

The reason is very simple. The codes and rules of such tribunals must be so vague, they must depend so much on that erring guide, the conscience; are capable of so little



precision, and withal have so powerful, yet deceptive a pretext for zeal, as the promotion of the *will* of God, which every zealot construes to be his *own* will, that they always have, and always must, terminate in tyranny. Heaven forbid, that we should any of us, live to see the day in which the Reverend author of this report, or any other Reverend Doctor should be promoted to a *permanent* seat in a *permanent* body, with the powers they propose to assume, to wit, "To exercise stated and continued inspection over ministers and churches, to prevent ordination when they see fit, to bring lay brethren to account, and to try, depose and for ever disqualify ministers whom they may decide to be offenders in morals or faith."

This is all—!! my brethren, and it does not much exceed the enormous powers claimed by the worst ecclesiastical tyrants which the dark ages produced——

The *second* alleged objection against mutual councils is, "that they may be evaded by the offender's refusal to join in the choice of them or to submit to their decisions."

This is partly evasive and partly untrue. If an offender refuses to join in choosing a mutual council, the remedy by *ex parte* council is open and perfect. This portion of the objection is therefore evasive.

If he does join in choosing a mutual council, it is untrue that he can successfully resist its decisions. The other party can force him to submit to them, if such other party be a parish, by dismissing the pastor; if a pastor, by suing for and recovering his salary.

3d. Objection. "Mutual councils," say the committee, "have no code to govern their proceedings." Nor have referees; yet the latter mode of trial has existed for a thousand years, and is still a favourite one. But what occasion is there for codes and rules and legal forms, when six or eight clergymen assemble to heal a breach in the church of Christ? Did St. Paul send any code of rules to



the Romans or Corinthians, or is there any pretence that there were proctors, or doctors, or any canon law among the early churches? We know there were none.

Fourthly. It is objected, that "Mutual councils may be multiplied without number." We have only to say, this is not the fact. If they may sometimes be divided, so too may a jury, so will be often this proposed sovereign remedy, the Consociations, if they are fairly and honourably composed. It is impossible men should always agree on religious subjects, unless it shall please God to shower down more of his gracious spirit than any divines now possess. There are now probably several hundred open avowed sects, and several thousand various and discordant opinions.

Lastly, It is objected, that "mutual councils are constituted in a manner unfavourable to impartiality, to unanimity and justice, and not calculated to give satisfaction to the parties."

We admit they are unfavourable to unanimity, and while christians see but as through a glass darkly, this is an excellence; for there never can be unanimity in our present state of knowledge, without improper coercion. As to justice and impartiality, we think the old councils are calculated to be the fairest possible tribunals.

With regard to their tendency to give satisfaction, we doubt whether if the offender should concur with the consociation in doctrine, the parish who should complain would be better satisfied with the new tribunals than with mutual councils. If for example, Dr. Morse's parish should gather sufficient courage to insist on his doing justice to Miss Adams, or should complain of his occupations in book-making, and creed-making, as inconsistent with his parochial duties, we doubt whether they would be better satisfied to submit the case to an orthodox consociation, than to have a voice in the choice of judges.

In a word, we admit that the consociation would be more uniform, more vigilant, more severe; we have no doubt they would have code upon code so voluminous, that none but the adepts could understand them; but as to justice and impartiality, they would never be considered as welcome guests, whenever sectarian questions and prejudices should interfere. While we have no doubt, that Channing and Thacher, *cum multis aliis*, would be struck off the list of christian pastors as "corrupt and heretical," Dr. Morse, upon complaint, would be acquitted of all censure, and it would be decided, that his conduct to Miss Adams had been marked by christian charity and tenderness, that his refusal to abide by the award of referees had been dictated by justice and honour, that his character was truly apostolick, and that they hoped he would inherit a crown of glory, and take his seat between St. Peter and St. Paul.

It is on this subject, that the committee of the grand association undertake to run a parallel between the proceedings at common law, and those under the canon law in this state. They say the evil in the churches is as great under the Cambridge Platform, as it would be in society if the courts of law were like mutual councils, temporary bodies. They ask "what mischiefs would ensue if the criminal in common life had the right to choose his judges?" And is it come to this? Is it avowed by these reverend divines, that ministers are to be put on a footing with cut throats and pickpockets, and shoplifters? Are ecclesiastical offences of the same deep moral dye as those which courts of criminal jurisdiction are empowered to restrain and punish? Are any of our clergy charged with such enormous crimes? It is new to us.

If not, if the offences charged on them are only errors, *however great*, errors only in opinion, is there not a material distinction in the nature of the offence and the urgency of the remedy?

The parallel is a strange and illiberal one. In what respect will the consociations resemble the supreme judicial court? How will they remedy the present defects? Are they, like the courts of law, appointed by one head? Are they independent in their salaries and in their tenure of office? Not so.—They are the mere creatures of the choice of every parish, however ignorant or well informed, and are often chosen by small majorities.

No, if we must alter the Platform in order to accommodate these gentlemen with a permanent and stable body like the courts of law, let us render the resemblance perfect—let us have some tolerable security and chance of talents and impartiality. Let us have a court for ecclesiastical cases, composed of three laymen and two clerks. Let them be appointed by the executive, and removeable on address of the Legislature. But to give Mr. Codman's little parish an equal voice in deciding upon Mr. Channing's orthodoxy with his own, which is three times as large, is preposterous, unequal, and of course, unjust. Yet such is the scheme recommended for our adoption.

Let us now consider the third ground taken by the committee, in favour of these consociations or ecclesiastical courts, which is the authority of Scripture. Though a layman, I presume I can read and judge of the meaning of a plain text as well as another.

Surely if consociations and ecclesiastical tribunals were intended to be established by Christ or his apostles, they would have been directed in plain terms, subject to no cavil; and if the committee have cited no texts but such as are equivocal, it is a proof, that they are attempting to wrest the scriptures to the furtherance of their own views.

The first proposition is "that each church hath within itself full power to administer all the ordinances, and is not under any ecclesiastical jurisdiction whatever."

These are the words of the committee. We agree to it. It is the very corner-stone of Congregationalism; but how it could be cited in favour of a most enormous ecclesiastical usurpation, we cannot conceive.

Secondly. It is asserted, that "Churches do stand in a sisterly relation to each other, being united in the same faith and order." This is not denied. They owe each other assistance in calamity, in case of sickness or death of the pastor, in exchanging labours of love; at ordinations, dedications, and other like cases. But does it result from this that they have any judicial authority over each other, and if so, to what extent? The only texts cited are,

Ephesians, iv. 5. There is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." This gives no authority. If it does, it goes to support the Church of Rome in obliging all churches to conform to her faith, a faith that has fifteen hundred years support, and has been embraced by three fourths of all Christendom. If you dissent from her "*one faith*" it must be on the ground, that though in truth there can be but one faith, yet each separate church must decide for itself what that faith is. There is no middle course.

The second text is Philippians, iii. 16.\* "Let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." Where so little attention is paid to accuracy, it is perhaps useless to remark, that *Griesbach* has rejected from this text the words "Rule," and some others in this passage. If, however, the received text be admitted, it must mean, Let us walk by the rule of the gospel. Churches should endeavour to agree in this rule, but it can never be intended that the

\* Philippians, iii. 16. *Griesbach* rejects from the text *καὶ νομι, το αὐτο* *φρονησιν*. The improved Version translates it, "However, as far as we have reached, let us walk therein."

majority should settle *definitively what that rule is*. If they can, the Reformation was an unjustifiable, unscriptural, wicked thing. If any number of churches can settle the rule, then the Roman Catholick, the oldest and most numerous, had a right to fix the creed for all the christian world.

The next text is Ephesians, iv. 11 and 13. "And he gave some prophets, some apostles, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers."—"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

What man in his sober senses, not intent on building up a system, can see a foundation for consociations with power to settle the faith, accept, admit, sustain and depose pastors in all this passage? Surely it is not pretended, that the Consociators are apostles or prophets. What is their authority then from this text? The thirteenth verse relates not to the churches, but to the great body of the disciples. They are said to come, or a wish is expressed, that they *may* come, to unity of faith. But there is no intimation, that even the evangelists or apostles had authority to settle that faith for the whole church, in any *other* way, than by respectful advice, and interpretation. Indeed it will appear, that each of the apostles settled the faith for himself, without reference to any common standard.

The third proposition of the committee is, "that communion of churches is the faithful improvement of the gifts of Christ bestowed on them for his service and glory."—Nobody disputes this. It is therefore useless to examine the quotations. The question is still open, to what extent does this communion reach, and what are the authorities of the united body?

The fourth proposition is "Acts of communion are such as these."



1st. "Hearty prayer and care for one another." As to prayer, this is conceded ; but as to *care*, if it be meant care of their souls, and regulation of each others' faith, we deny it, and proceed to examine the pretended authority for it.

2 Corinthians xi. 28. "Besides those things which are without, that which cometh on me daily, the *care of all the churches*."

There are the words of St. Paul, when enumerating his labours and sufferings for the cause of Christ. He was an apostle sent to preach the gospel by Christ himself, converted to the christian faith by a miracle, endued with supernatural gifts, able therefore to guide the consciences of all christians. Now if this Committee have these gifts, perhaps they may be entitled to the *care of all the churches*. But it is as absurd, to infer from the authority delegated to, or exercised by St. Paul, that the same powers have devolved upon the Middlesex or Norfolk clergy, as it would be, that because the Apostles raised men from the dead, they also could do the same.

The next quotation is still more absurd, 1. Rom. i. 9.\* "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers." This was also the language of the same apostle, but there is not a *colour of foundation* for an ecclesiastical tribunal in these words, and I doubt whether these orthodox gentlemen perform honestly, what the apostle conscientiously did, whether they are always mindful of us hereticks in their prayers. At any rate let them confine themselves to THAT exercise, which we admit is both lawful and expedient.

The 2nd duty or act of communion is, to "afford relief by communion of temporal and *spiritual* necessities."

\* See Archbishop Newcome's translation of Rom. i. 9. in the Improved Version.

As to temporal necessities, we are all agreed, that they ought to be relieved, and so also spiritual wants, so far as we have above defined them, the obligation to relieve them is unquestionable.

We doubt however whether it be a christian duty to call a brother a heretick, or to judge him without reason.

The citation from Romans xv. 26 27.\* relates only to pecuniary aid. That from Acts xi. 22, 26. merely shews that when those who had been dispersed and scattered by persecution began to assemble, the Christians at Jerusalem sent a missionary to comfort and confirm them.

The quotation from 2 Corinthians viii. 1, 4, 14. relates solely to the *pecuniary* assistance furnished to the brethren at Jerusalem by the church of Macedonia.

The 3d act of communion is alleged to be "to maintain unity and peace by giving an account one to another of their publick actions."

This authority, if founded in scripture, would certainly go very far to maintain the right claimed by this committee; but it is truly painful to see clergymen thus distort and misrepresent the holy scriptures.

No where is this duty of giving an account to any body, as to a superiour tribunal, enforced in the sacred writings.

Many acts of fellowship, which were both expedient and necessary in the early ages of the church, have long since ceased to be so.

The Church was then encompassed with enemies: It was shaken by persecution. The closest bonds of union were necessary. These motives have now ceased to exist. Let us examine the only authority for this accountability of one church to another as to its publick actions.

\* The Jews having made the Gentiles "*partakers of spiritual things*" refers to the "oracles of God" having been preserved by the former, &c. &c.

It is taken from Acts xi. 2, 4, 18. The case was simply this. The Jewish christians were offended with Peter for associating with, and preaching to the Gentiles. They called him to account for it. Peter, unwilling to lose his influence with the Jews, and wishing to quiet their tender consciences, gave them a history of his miraculous vision, and of the command he had received to preach to the Gentiles. But did Peter admit the right of the Church to call him to an account? Does this case prove the *expediency* of such an interference? It is a most unfortunate example for the Consociation; for in that case the whole church at Jerusalem, probably as competent as the Massachusetts General Association, did undertake to call an apostle to account, when they were *clearly in the wrong themselves*. This shews the danger and presumption of the interference of fallible men in matters of this nature. That they cannot comprehend the whole counsel of God, and ought not to judge each other. Was Peter right in preaching to the Gentiles? Then the church were wrong in calling him to account. Peter, it is true, gave them satisfaction, not as a matter of right but of expedience.

How dangerous would be this power in a church not better informed than the first church at Jerusalem, when we have no longer an apostle to correct their mistakes!!!

I have thus shewn, by a very brief analysis, on what slender grounds reposes this assumed authority of judging the Churches. I could extend the same inquiry to the few remaining texts, but I trust I have done enough, by producing the most prominent. There is no middle course, as I have already had occasion to remark, between the admission of the full extent of ecclesiastical dominion claimed by the Romish see, and the entire liberty of each separate church.

## CHAPTER IV.

*The real motives of the proposed change or subversion of the Congregational mode of government, and of the substitution of the Consociations in its place.*

WE have seen, that the *avowed* motives for such a change are either too loose and declamatory, or too trifling and unfounded to be the true ones. Yet as men do not embark in such attempts, which involve so much labour and wear of conscience, without strong inducements, it behoves us to inquire what these must be.

If one was disposed to be sententious, we might say, that we fear that neither the love of God, or of one's neighbour, neither a wish to promote the spread of christianity, or a desire of union among the churches, were the prevailing motives with the prime movers of this scheme, but that they may be resolved into two passions, envy, and the love of power.

We are happy, that this charge does not extend to many persons. There is no evidence that the association in general approve of these propositions.

The project of the committee is a vast, and bold one.—It aims at the overthrow of principles and usages which have been settled for nearly two centuries. It is a retrograde measure, from the principles of the reformation, to the tyrannical doctrines of the fifteenth century. It is the signal for new, and perhaps even bloody contentions in the church. It is ushered in under the most unfavourable auspices. Never was the Church more quiet than before the publication of this plan. Never was an harmony more delightful to christians than that which lately prevailed. Every sect, and every christian enjoys the right in peace,

to read and interpret the scriptures, according to the light which God has given them. Since the apostolick age such a privilege has never before been enjoyed in any quarter of the globe. Why disturb this harmony? Why deface and distort this delightful picture? it is said that the church is teeming with errors and corruptions. If you listen to the committee, you would suppose that christian America exhibited a chaos, in which vices and errors were predominant. But is this so? or is it a calumny against our age and country? What corrupt clergymen have been settled? What partial, prejudiced councils have been holden?—In what instances have the doors of one church been opened to the outcasts of another? It is said, incompetent men get into the ministry. It is supposed the committee mean into Congregational societies. Let us have the cases. Who are they, and in what parishes? Perhaps it will be seen, that the most able and competent men are, in the *views of of the committee*, incompetent.

Much complaint is made too, of the decay of piety. This might be granted safely, without attributing it to any defect in the government of the Church. Morals may change from a thousand causes exterior to, and foreign from the Church. To prove that the Church is in fault, it should be shewn, that there has been corruption or partiality in the Courts established by the ancient Platform, or that abuses remained unredressed after the most effectual measures had been taken to remedy them. We now challenge the committee, Messrs. Woods, Codman, and Morse, to state the cases, and the parishes in which these evils have occurred, what measures they or others have taken to redress them, and in what instances they have proved ineffectual. Upon doing this, we pledge ourselves to reply to the specific cases. If they are right, we will acknowledge our error; if wrong, we will prove them so.



This however, be assured, fellow-citizens, they will never do. The facts are against them, and they prefer to rest under the shelter of broad assertion.

But why this delicacy in stating the whole truth? Why not avow, that the complaint is, that Mr. Burr could not compel his whole parish to hear him after he had changed his opinions?

The real difficulty is, not that the mode of trial is not a good one, but that it is one, which is not wholly under the control of these people. As the power at present is such, that a minority can protect themselves against an overbearing and violent majority by insisting on mutual councils, as this minority have dared to breathe *in whispers* their opinions, they must be put down. There must be but one sentiment, and Dr. Morse's, and Dr. Worcester's reading must be the gauge of that opinion. Thus, for example, Boston for fifty years has nourished, may I say, has honoured and loved and revered men whom *they* call a sect of hereticks, its Chaunceys, and Mayhews, and Clarkes, and Belknaps, and many others enumerated in the eloquent letter of President Adams to Dr. Morse, and she must now be both purified and punished. Unhappily for the violent, these men have been uncommonly learned and able. Another passion has been excited. Those must be silenced who could not be answered. Hence human learning has been decried, and the University, the nurse of this detested literature, must be rendered odious.

The true motives of this change are to counteract those whom they please to call hereticks, that is, those who are as learned, as able, and as liberal as themselves. This, I presume, not an honest man of the orthodox party will deny. He will not, to his conscience, whatever he may say to the world. The means of effecting their object, is to get possession of ecclesiastical power, to coerce, intimidate, and

finally expel the minority, and thus to overawe, if not command that citadel of learning and religion, our University, the best and highest object of reverence and affection in our country.

If it be asked, in what manner, and by what course of proceedings these designs are to be accomplished, we answer, by the exercise of the powers granted to the proposed Consociations, so often attempted to be established in the early periods of our history, but as often defeated by the prudence and proper jealousy of the lay part of the community.

If any number of churches can be persuaded to enter into these consociations, they expect to fix them for ever in a state of thralldom. Thus, suppose Dr. Morse's, or any other church, could be persuaded to join this new establishment; upon the pastor's decease, no man can be permitted to preach in such church upon probation, unless approved by the consociation. The people of the parish are to have no vote on that question in the first instance. Nobody can be admitted into such a church, till approved by the consociation.

If any number of the parishioners should know of a respectable candidate, and should insist upon hearing him against the will of the church, and should vote to settle him, the consociation to which the church has attached itself, may refuse him ordination. The parish will have no right to call in such churches as they may prefer. They are to be bound down for ever to the consociation as the superiour tribunal.

Such we say are the objects of this new plan. It is true, the courts of law can, and will restrain them, but this does not alter the nature of the project.

In like manner, if a clergyman now settled in any church which may join the consociations, should in the prosecution of his studies change any of his opinions, with the perfect approbation, both of his church and people, it will be competent to any minister of the consociation to cite him as a *criminal* to answer for his heretical opinions, and upon trial he may be deposed from the ministerial office and dismissed from his parish. There are no limits prescribed to the extent of these consociations. Wherever the liberal clergy are now a majority, the consociators may, by enlarging the limits of the consociations, outvote them, and make them a minority.

Thus it would be in the power of a small majority in the whole state, to control and displace the minority.

It is hoped also, that the authority and influence of these great consociations will, by degrees, so far overawe the churches which may not join them in the first instance, as to give them an opportunity of filling up any vacancies with clergymen devoted to their views.

It is, in short, an organized, affiliated association for the purpose of rooting out all ministers who will not subscribe to the creed of the authors of this plan.

## CHAPTER V.

*What are the rights of the Members of Congregational Societies, as recognized by the Constitution and Judicial decisions of this State?*

In examining this branch of the subject, it is immaterial what powers church members formerly usurped, or what authority ecclesiastical bodies anciently assumed. The

existing law must alone govern, and that law can only be pronounced by the highest judicial authorities. As the ecclesiastical power stood at the adoption of the constitution, so it must for ever remain, until that constitution shall be altered or amended.

The *church* is now placed, as it ought to be in all countries, especially those which are free, in a situation distinct from the other members of a parish, having no authority over any but its own members, possessing no voice in the choice or deposition of a pastor, nor any control over his opinions or mode of preaching, greater than other members of the same parish or society enjoy.

That such is the law of the land, fully, finally and perfectly settled, that the contract between a minister and his parish is purely civil, and that no ecclesiastical body has, or can have a right to interfere between them, except in the mode pointed out by the Cambridge Platform, will be abundantly proved by the following decisions of the Supreme Judicial Court.

In the case of *Avery vs. Tyringham*, 3 Massachusetts Term Reports, the main question was, whether a town could dismiss a clergyman, without good cause, at its pleasure. The court decided that it could not, and in delivering the opinion of the Bench, Chief Justice Parsons added, " This article of the constitution (the 3d.) had without doubt made some alteration in the ecclesiastical establishments of the State. Under the colonial laws, the church members in full communion had the exclusive right of electing and settling their minister, to whose support all the inhabitants of the town were obliged to contribute. Under the colony charter, no man could be a freeman unless he was a church member until 1662, and a majority of the church constituted a majority of the legal vo-

" ters of the town. After that time, inhabitants not church  
 " members, if freeholders, and having certain other quali-  
 " fications, might be admitted to the rights of freemen.—  
 " In consequence of this a different method of settling a  
 " minister was adopted under the Provincial charter.—  
 " The church made the election and sent their proceedings  
 " to the town for their approbation. If the town approv-  
 " ed the election, it also voted the salary and settlement.  
 " When the candidate accepted, he was solemnly introduc-  
 " ed to office by ordination, and became the settled minister,  
 " entitled to his salary and settlement under the votes of the  
 " town.

" If the town disapproved, and the church insisted on the  
 " election, it might call an ecclesiastical council, and if the  
 " council approved the election, the town was obliged to  
 " maintain the person chosen as the settled minister of the  
 " place; but if the council disapproved, the church must  
 " have proceeded to a new election.

" By the *constitution* the rights of the town are *enlarg-*  
 " *ed*, if it choose to exercise them, and those of the church  
 " *impaired*.

" If the church, when their election has been disapprov-  
 " ed by the town, shall unwisely refuse to make a new elec-  
 " tion, or *if the town for any cause* shall abandon the an-  
 " cient usages of the country in settling a minister, it *may*,  
 " *without* or AGAINST the consent of the church, elect a  
 " publick teacher and contract to support him."

The chief justice also, in direct contradiction to Dr.  
 Morse and his committee, declared, that for immorality or  
 even negligence there is now a competent remedy against  
 the pastor. We have therefore the same stable and fixed tri-  
 bunal in such cases, for which the committee appear to be  
 so anxious, and a much more important one than that which  
 they propose. He proceeds "There are also objections



“to a minister founded in questions of doctrine and discipline. In all these cases, the parties, if they cannot agree to dissolve the contract, may call to their assistance a council mutually chosen, and their advice, technically called *their result*, is so far of the nature of an award, that *either party conforming thereto* will be justified.”

This again contradicts all the assertions and reasoning of the committee, as to the imperfect nature of mutual councils.

“If, adds the late learned Judge, in a case proper for a mutual council, either party should unreasonably, or without good cause, refuse their concurrence to a mutual choice, the aggrieved party may choose an impartial council and *will be justified in conforming thereto*.”

“Thus a *reasonable* tribunal is established to decide on all cases of difficulty and controversy between a minister and his people, a tribunal, founded in ancient usage, resorted to in practice, and probably in many cases, but certainly in one, in which I was council, *supported* by the opinion of all the Judges of the Supreme Judicial Court.”

Now in whom are we to place confidence as to the Laws of the land, in Dr. Morse, or the judges of the highest Courts of Law?

The former represents mutual councils as scenes of partiality and prejudice, incompetent, inconclusive, ineffectual. The latter say, they are founded in ancient usage, are venerable and effectual in their operations and results. In the case of Fuller vs. Inhabitants of Princeton, this last opinion was fully established.

In the case of Burr vs. Inhabitants of first parish in Sandwich, 9th Massachusetts Term Reports, the Chief Justice again recognizes this doctrine of the perfect competency of councils to afford relief; and in stronger terms.

“ The *Law* as applicable to the question before us, is not  
 “ *disputed* by either of the parties. It is not denied, that  
 “ in a proper case between a minister and his parish for  
 “ the advice of an ecclesiastical council, if either party  
 “ offer to the other such a council to be mutually cho-  
 “ sen, and the other without sufficient cause refuse to join in  
 “ the choice, the party offering may choose an ecclesiastical  
 “ council, and the advice of the council so chosen, and act-  
 “ ing fairly and honestly, will *justify either party* in adopt-  
 “ ing their result.”

In the same cause, the Chief Justice said, “ Our ances-  
 “ ters came to this country *smarting from the rod* of the  
 “ hierarchy then in power in the country from which they  
 “ emigrated. They were *hostile to any ecclesiastical co-*  
 “ *ercive jurisdiction whatever* in all matters of doctrine  
 “ *and discipline, as repugnant to the liberties of the*  
 “ *churches* ; and although *synods* were holden, and councils  
 “ of the churches convened, yet no compulsory authority  
 “ was vested in them : and the utility of any ecclesiastical  
 “ coercive power has been doubted, as tending to repress a  
 “ free and liberal inquiry after truth, and to SUBSTITUTE  
 “ FOR THE ERROURS OF HERESY, SOMETIMES QUESTIONA-  
 “ BLE, the VICE of *hypocrisy, always censurable.*”

A more conclusive opinion on any judicial question was never promulgated, and surely none was ever expressed in language more elegant and forcible. If Chief Justice Parsons had never written any opinions on other subjects, these alone would have rendered his memory dear to the friends of religious liberty. This is not extravagant, because it is difficult to produce from any jurist or philosopher opinions, more correct, or more simply and elegantly expressed.

Such then are the existing laws of Massachusetts with regard to the ecclesiastical power : A system of laws and

principles which cannot be changed without the consent of the whole people. From them it appears, that the whole and uncontrolled power of settling a minister is vested in the members of every parish, as distinct from the church, if they see fit to exercise it—That the only legal mode of removing a pastor is by a mutual council, or in case of refusal of the pastor to join in it, by an *ex parte* council.—That this remedy is ancient, venerable and recognized by our courts of law as absolute and binding—That there can be no other legal or constitutional ecclesiastical tribunal with coercive powers ; and that in the opinion of the court, such a jurisdiction as Dr. Morse now sets up, would be opposed to the principles of our ancestors, to the usages of the country, and to the rights and liberties of the people.

## CONCLUSION, AND INFERENCES.

IF such be the law of Massachusetts, recognized by its highest judicial authority, in what manner can it be changed, except by an alteration of the constitution, or by the interference of the legislature ; a mode which is itself perhaps questionable ?

It would be injurious to these Reverend Gentlemen to presume, that they contemplate a measure, which shall have no other than a moral or honourable authority. It would be unworthy of the labour they have bestowed on it, if not a single order, or decree, or result, would have the smallest legal or practical force. This would, in fact, overthrow the only arguments in its favour, since the principal objections to our old and venerable system, consist in its inadequacy to effect its objects, and its want of coercive powers.

If, therefore, our judges understand the law, it is absolutely impracticable to give the smallest efficacy to the new system of ecclesiastical dominion : certainly it is so without the aid of the Legislature. It is hardly to be presumed that the Baptists, and Quakers, and Episcopalians in that body, will lend their aid, in giving force, and extension, and dominion to a sect, which is now the ruling one, and whose past measures cannot excite in them the most perfect confidence in its liberality.

Let us however, examine this question more nearly.

Suppose the Grand Association, after sounding, as they profess to do, the sentiments of the people by this publication, should proceed at their next general self-created assembly, to adopt Dr. Morse's report.

Among other powers, with which the Consociations are vested by this project, they are substituted in the place of mutual councils, and all the old ecclesiastical modes of trial and relief are repealed. The consociations are to be empowered "to hear and decide upon any complaint or allegation touching ministerial character, against any minister belonging to it, to acquit or find guilty, to *advise and sustain or depose*, as the case may require." Now we ask, suppose the grand association of ministers do as they propose, adopt this system ; will it bind their parishioners ? No.

Will it bind their churches ? No.

Will it bind even the members who are present and vote for it ? No.

A bargain or contract, in derogation of natural liberty and the rights of conscience, is void. But admit that this salutary principle of the common law does not here apply, which we think it does in the greatest force, still of what use will your new code be, if it does not bind the parish or the church ?

But it will be said, we are sensible of this, and we will have the consent both of parish and church.

Then you must have the *unanimous* consent, for it is one of the cases in which the majority cannot bind the minority. The laws of the land, and the principles of religious liberty, cannot be altered or abandoned, or surrendered by any majorities.

It is as if a parish were to vote to return to the British Crown, or to invite Bonaparte to accept a diadem. The minority could not be obliged by such votes.

But this is not all. The majority, who should vote for it, would not be bound by it. They might withdraw that approbation, *ad libitum*. A member of a parish or church could not bind the purchaser of his estate or pew, neither could he fetter the consciences of his children. I state undeniable truths. Your system then, as a compact, can only extend to the individual who subscribes to it.

Thus, suppose a minister charged with heresy, and suppose both him and his church to be members of your confederacy or consociation, suppose such minister deposed for his errors, Dr. Worcester for example; and suppose his parish, like Mr. Norton's of Weymouth, should agree with him, and should order the decree of the consociation deposing their minister to be burnt by the common hangman, what is your remedy? None.

Yes. You will say, we can put the church out of communion. So you can now do, without any consociation.

This leads me to notice an alarming innovation in the proposed project. Under the old system, no minister could be brought to trial without a major vote of his own parishioners. This repressed that vile spirit of litigation and slander to which men are so prone.

By the present project we perceive, that a minister may be accused before the consociation by any member of his



church, or by the minister of another church, even when his whole parish are entirely satisfied with his doctrines and conduct. A more dreadful plan for convulsing and tearing in pieces the church of Christ can scarcely be conceived.

If then this plan can have no operation except with regard to the churches who may join it ; if even these churches can bind themselves only, and not the whole parish or society ; if they cannot bind even the minority of the church, who may dissent either at first, or at any subsequent period ; if a clergyman can be settled against the consent of the consociations, under the authority of the old Platform ; if a pastor, deposed by the new consociations, will still retain his sacerdotal character, and can sue for and recover his salary, of what practical efficacy will the new constitution be ? That this is so, we appeal to every sound lawyer in the state. We invite them to examine the constitution, and the decisions of the Supreme Judicial Court, and to say, whether any body, whether synod, council, or the new fangled bodies called consociations, or associations, have power to change the ecclesiastical government of the Congregational Churches ?

If these principles are correct, and we feel a high confidence that they are so, how are the difficulties stated by the committee (which, in fact, have no existence) to be remedied by this plan ?

It is said, in high sounding language without meaning, that "the offender must stand for trial before the *whole* church," by which is intended, I presume, the whole Congregational Church. It is not proposed, I should presume, to summon Mr. Channing or Dr. Porter, before Dr. Baldwin, Dr. Gardiner, or bishop Cheverus.

But where is the authority for the whole Congregational Church to assemble, and settle dogmas of faith and try

hereticks? Did they ever admit such a jurisdiction? No. Their whole conduct and principles are opposed to it.

These, however, are not the whole difficulties of the case; *the greatest remains*——

When the churches, or any number of them, shall have entered into these Consociations, they may be Presbyterians, or Episcopalians, or Consociationalists, but *they will cease to be Congregationalists*. This is no nice metaphysical distinction, it is founded on principles not to be refuted.

What is congregationalism? What is the distinctive characteristic of congregational churches, as opposed to other sects? It consists **SOLELY**, I repeat it, *solely* in the form of church government, not in doctrine. The *orthodox* congregationalists agree with the church of England in all its articles of faith. It is only in their ideas as to the government of the church that they differ.

The sect of congregationalists had scarcely an existence before our ancestors emigrated to America; and we have shown by ample evidence, which we shall render more clear by our Notes, that their essential characteristic was the denial of any ecclesiastical coercive power. What greater coercive power can there be, than that proposed by the committee, to prevent the election of pastors, and to depose a minister of Christ, against the will of his people?

The consociations are therefore a departure from congregationalism. They will become a new sect. Whatever name they usurp, the effect will be the same.

Every man, then, in any parish now congregational, which shall vote to join, and shall join the *new sect*, will be absolved from his obligations to the pastor and parish. He can lawfully refuse to contribute to the support of the consociating sect on the plea that he is a congregationalist, and cannot conscientiously attend a consociating minister; that

he is opposed in his conscience to ecclesiastical tyranny, and that his money must go to the support of some congregational clergyman.

He may join any congregational society in the state, and his taxes must be paid over to such pastor of the old persuasion.

Who will deny these principles? Will any sensible lawyer, or other sound layman or divine dispute them? He must either deny our premises or conclusion. Will he question our definition of congregationalism? Let him find a better, supported by as great authorities. Will he deny that the Independents or congregationalists held, that each church had full power within itself to govern and regulate its affairs? That it was accountable to no synods, councils, or other ecclesiastical tribunals?

If he admits these premises, he surely cannot deny that the proposed system is a direct and palpable departure from these principles. If so, the new consociators will constitute a new sect, to which the old congregationalists are no longer held to adhere.

I have now closed my proposed inquiry. It would ill suit such a serious, argumentative essay, to attempt to make any appeal to the passions. If such a course had been proper, I am little qualified to adopt it. I have brought to this task only a deep and solemn conviction, I may say, an affecting one, that the proposed measures will end in the disunion of the congregational churches.

I know the zeal with which the system is pursued, and I augur but little effect from my feeble exertions to stop the headlong current. Every effort will be made to prevent this essay from being read, sober and dispassionate as it is. But the day will assuredly arrive, when the principles laid down in the preceding Inquiry will be developed by abler men, and will be very generally admitted.

The rupture and convulsion of many parishes in which the clergy, who favour these violent measures, now feel secure; the general disgust at such an assumption of power, the refusal of many individuals, in parishes where the majority may join the consociations, to submit to their authority, and the general admiration of the conduct of those ministers, who shall have adhered to the ancient and venerable system of religious freedom transmitted to us by our ancestors, will finally and inevitably produce an assent to the principles we have advanced, and as general a censure and condemnation of the few restless men, by whom these changes have been introduced.

A LAYMAN.





## NOTES.

### NOTE 1st.

AS some persons may be disposed to doubt the authority of Chief Justice Parsons in the historical part of his opinions, because they do not favour the views of the friends of the new system of ecclesiastical dominion, we have thought it best to cite some passages from the Rev. Wm. Hubbard's history of New England, a work of the first authority, and conclusive on this subject; since he was cotemporary with Cotton Mather, the author of the *famous* Manuscript, was as orthodox as any man then or now living, and must have felt disposed to give all due weight to the ecclesiastical power. It will be seen that Chief Justice Parsons drew his knowledge on this subject, in a great measure, from this pure orthodox source.

It appears, that Messrs. Shelton and Higginson of Salem, were elected by the people and ordained by them, without the aid of any other Churches or Pastors. Plymouth had been invited to send messengers, but they arrived after the ordination. Hubbard, 119. printed copy.

"Whatever sinister apprehensions are or ever were taken up about the religion of the Colony of New England, they aimed only at the primitive pattern described in the word of God, and practice of the apostolical churches." Hubbard 181.

We have shewn from Mosheim that there was no ecclesiastical authority in the apostolical churches, out of the limits of each separate church.

One of the principles of church government in Massachusetts, according to Hubbard, was the following :

4th. "That there is no jurisdiction to which such particular churches are or ought to be subject (be it placed in classis, or synod) by way of *authoritative censure*, or any church power, *extrinsical* to the *said churches*, which they ought to have dependence upon any other sort of men for the exercise of." Hubbard 184.

In 1637 the first synod was called in New-England, not by ecclesiastical but by the civil authority. It will not do to examine its proceedings too minutely. It is certain, they have no tendency to increase our veneration for councils and synods. The only wise thing they appear to have said or done was "disclaiming any judicial power." "For according to the principles of Congregational churches, the *question* only is to be carried to the synod, but the *case* remains with the *particular church* to which the person is related."

“Disputes ran so high in that synod, that the magistrates were compelled to interfere to prevent disturbance. Some of the Boston members were disgusted and withdrew.” Hubbard 301-2.

“In 1642, Mr. Carter was ordained pastor of Woburn. There was some difference about the manner of his ordination, for, in regard they had no other officer in the church besides, nor any members that thought themselves fit to solemnize such an ordinance, they were advised by some, to desire the elders of other churches to perform it, by imposing hands on Mr. Carter; but others, supposing it might be the means or occasion of introducing the dependency of churches, &c. and so of a presbytery, were not so free to admit thereof, and therefore it was performed by one of their own members, though not so well to the satisfaction of some of the magistrates and ministers then present; and since that time it hath been *more frequent* to desire the elders of neighbouring churches, to ordain such, as are by the *churches* and *people* chosen to be their officers. Hubbard 408.

Here we see the extreme jealousy of our ancestors, and that the present usages as to ordination are only matters of courtesy; being *frequently* submitted to in order to please some weaker magistrates, who could not relish scriptural simplicity.

The next great council was the synod in 1648. On which we remark:

1. That a law was necessary to call it, no ecclesiastical power being competent so to do.

2. That even that synod was looked upon with a jealous eye. Some of the deputies or members of the General Court questioned the power of the Court. “As also, because the main end was, for an agreement of one uniform practice in all the churches, to be commended to the General Court which *seemed* to give power either to the synod or the Court to *compel* the churches to *practice* what shall be so established; but being assured that the synod would have no authoritative power, but the court would have liberty to adopt or not just as they pleased, the objections were withdrawn.” Hubbard 533.

“Still, many of the churches could not swallow it, because they feared it was the intention to have ecclesiastical laws to bind the church. Hubbard 534.

3d. It must be noticed, that the proceedings of the synod were considered of no account, till adopted by the Legislature.

It was this synod which framed the Cambridge Platform. It was duly passed into a law by the legislative adoption; and, according to Hubbard, by that rule the Churches of New-England have ever since been ordered. This was written about forty years after. One of the main principles of the Platform is as follows:—

"13. Particular churches, though they are distinct, and <sup>so</sup> have not power one over another, yet because they are united to Christ, not only as a mystical but a political head, they ought to have communion one with another by way of mutual care, consultation, admonition, and participation in the same ordinances." *Hubbard* 540.

Not a syllable of deposition, or trial of offences committed by one church, by any number of churches convened; They never carried it farther than requiring the advice of mutual councils.

"In these propositions," says Hubbard, "are summed up in brief the principles of the Congregational Churches of New-England, as to *Church government*; which is the *only point* wherein they differ from the rest of the reformed churches, whether English, Belgick or Gallick."

See our argument on *this point* in the conclusion of our essay.

In 1680, a synod again declared, that there was nothing respecting *doctrine*, but what concerns *worship and discipline*, that caused their ancestors to remove to the deserts of America, that there they might have liberty to practise accordingly: "and as to what concerns Church Government, they refer to the platform of discipline agreed upon by the messengers of their churches in 1648, solemnly owned and confirmed in the last synod."

*Hubbard, p. 623.*

This was thirty two years after the adoption of that Platform. They had seen its effects, were satisfied with it, and ratified it solemnly again. The allegations of Dr. Morse, that they were soon discontented with it are unfounded. There always have been some men, who wanted a stricter mode of discipline, but the Churches, in all periods, have been, and we believe still are, opposed to any change of the ancient Platform.

#### NOTE 2d.

The Reverend Dr. Worcester, of Salem, in his third letter to Mr. Channing, asserts, that Dr. Cotton Mather's proposals were rejected by the Committee, "that not a scrip of them was retained, and that rather than to have submitted to them, some of the Committee, if not the whole, would have *resisted* unto blood." It is a little singular, that proposals of so bad a character should have been received with so much respect; that they should have been introduced into the Panoplist as an "invaluable relick," and treated by the association with so much attention. The only object of using Dr. Cotton Mather's manuscript must have been, to increase the evidence in favour of Consociations by the weight of *authority*. Now the *authority* of a man capable of proposing measures, which would call for "*resistance* unto

blood," appears to us to be of little weight. The same remark would apply to all the *nine ministers* who proposed the plan, and to the whole convention who adopted it. It is immaterial to what part of the old plan the objection *now* lies. If any feature was so odious as to require resistance, it must have been because it was repugnant to our rights. Any men capable of proposing *any thing* so repugnant, are not entitled to our confidence in such matters. But Dr. Worcester's is not a fair representation of the case. Our venerable fathers are very much calumniated. Their plan may be found in the Panoplist of July, 1815. We assert, without fear of refutation, that the old plan is less odious, more liberal, and less calculated to destroy our liberties, than the new one. There was no power given to the consociations in the former, to determine *who* should be *settled and deposed*, an authority expressly given in the present plan. So far from being *wholly rejected*, it is all retained and enlarged, except a single feature as to the associations, which was its best trait.

The same remark may be made on the quotations from Cotton, and Hooker, and all the early fathers of New-England. There is not one of them who does not distinctly, in clear and forcible terms, condemn the principles now set up in the present plan, as anti-christian. When they speak of consociations, they did not contemplate *standing judiciary* councils. They explicitly repel the idea. We beg our readers to consult the passages as we have done, and judge between us.

But the conclusive answer to all these cases, and one which might have superseded all others, is ; To what does an authority of this sort amount, which appears to have had no influence on the age in which it was produced, nor in the many generations which have followed ? From 1646 to 1706, there were some very active men who tried to enlarge the ecclesiastical power. At one time they pressed a synod, as in 1662, into their service—at another, the Convention. But they never had influence enough to procure the adoption of their plan by a single church. The efforts of Mr. Wise, of Ipswich, defeated them with the people. They never dared to publish the doings of the convention, and we are indebted to Mr. Wise for a knowledge of them. A whole century has since elapsed, and they are now brought out of their retirement, like the relicks of some saint, which the Catholics often fancy emit a grateful odour. Yet, even now, Dr. Worcester tells us that he would, like Mr. Wise, "resist it unto blood." So much for the *main* authority of Dr. Morse.



### NOTE 3d.

While Massachusetts, in 1706, indignantly and wisely spurned the ecclesiastical fetters which had been forged for her, Connecticut proved more submissive. Cotton Mather's plan was adopted at Saybrook. But that plan, as I have stated, did not, like Morse's, authorize consociations to interfere in the ordination of ministers. Not a sentence referred to it. Those ceremonies were accordingly conducted, as before, on the old Congregational plan, by calling in the neighbouring churches. Matters went on quietly in this way for fifty years. Now mark the inevitable progress of usurpation! In the year 1758 the town of Wallingford, in New-Haven county, elected the Rev. JAMES DANA their minister. The neighbouring churches were called in to ordain him as usual. But a few very turbulent men in the parish appealed to the *Consociation*, and charged Dr. Dana with the heresy of Arminianism. It was a new case. There was no precedent, and no law for the consociation. But when did men ever refuse to *exercise power when invited*? They cited the parish and Pastor as culprits. They forbade ordination. The town despised them as usurpers, and proceeded. The consociation then deposed Dr. Dana from the ministry, and excommunicated the church. This would have been pretty well for Hildebrand himself. But they distanced the Pontiff. They declared the venerable ordaining council, who adhered to publick liberty and law, *disorderly persons*. All these proceedings were in opposition to the Platform which gave them existence. The town however knew its rights. Dr. Dana continued to act, and the Consociation was ridiculed and despised. But mark the result. What was impudent assumption in 1758, has now become *law* by usurpation. The Consociation has reduced all the people and all the churches of Connecticut to the worst of all servitudes; for a church can neither *ordain* nor *retain* a beloved Pastor against the will of these usurping consociations. The limits of these notes, too extended already, will not permit me to enlarge on this case.

The curious may see it ably displayed in sundry pamphlets by *Jonathan Todd*, and *William Hart*, 1759, and *R. Wolcott*, 1760, which may be found in the Boston Athenæum, and probably at Cambridge.

I must, however, cite one or two passages from one of them, which having been written nearer the age of the attempted usurpation in 1706, is entitled to more credit than even Dr. Morse. "You," says this writer, (addressing one of the usurping Priests of that day,) "You say, that the churches are sick of their Platform, and that several memorials have been presented to the



"General Court of Massachusetts, praying for a synod to promote that so much desired plan of Consociations. If you had informed us, that the *churches* in that Province had presented these memorials, it would have been to *your purpose*; but you are too wise to tell us *who* presented them. However, Mr. *Wise* has told us. It was a set of ambitious clergymen, that *had conspired to betray* the liberties of the churches, for which *he calls them traitors.*" See Wolcott, page 9, printed in Boston, 1760.

So it would seem, that ambition and a desire to betray the liberties of the churches are not of recent growth only. The same writer says. "The Congregational platform allows the *churches* to choose a council known to them to be wise and just. *This*, your scheme, denies and subjects them wholly to the Consociation. It is certainly a greater privilege to ask council of men wise and friendly, than to be bound to men in an endless succession in some *post*, whom we know not, and cannot depend upon. Cranmer and Ridley, two good bishops, were succeeded by Gardiner and Bonner, two monsters; and what *has* been, *may* be. There is no dispute, other bodies have a right to ask counsel of men best able to direct them, and why should not *churches* have the same?"

Thus we see, if there were usurpers in 1758, there were also champions for religious freedom. God grant the latter race may never be extinct!

#### NOTE 4th.

The *Ratio Disciplina Fratrum Nor-Anglorum* is a *rare* book. Whether the committee and the reviewer hoped to induce the publick to believe that Dr. Cotton Mather, its author, was in favour of their system, I cannot say. Such was the impression made on my mind from their partial quotations, as mutilated as some of the passages of scripture have been in some theological writings. We affirm that Dr. Mather was, on the whole, well satisfied with the state of the church in 1719, when he wrote this book. He speaks of *other* people desiring a change, but *he* thought none necessary. The Committee of the Grand Association, for example, quote this sentence. "When councils are called by litigant parties in churches, it had been *hitherto* in the liberty of each party to choose and call their *own councils* where they pleased, which left room for much partiality to operate, and one council to succeed and oppose another with an endless confusion more proper for Babel than a city of God." So far the quotation, and one would infer from it, that these were his own opinions: far from it—he merely states the pleas of the disaffected and ambitious. He adds, "Through the blessing of God

their Saviour, the churches had not, IN FACT, seen much of this confusion, and it *may be*, the *prudent* servants of God had it more in FEAR than there was any need of." This certainly takes away the authority of Mather to the point of the *evils experienced* in his day, which was more than seventy years after the platform was adopted. In his judgment, it was *idle fear*, rather than *solid reason*, which led to the proposed consociations of which he was then treating. He adds in another page, that the consociation scheme succeeded in *one* state (Connecticut) but failed in the *other New-England States*, because "some considerable persons among the *ministers* and *brethren* thought the liberties of particular churches were in danger of being limited and infringed by them." So far he is quoted by the committee and the Panoplist reviewer, but they omit the conclusion of the same sentence. "Accordingly, the churches go on in the *old method*, of which an account has been given, and *human prudence* being obliged to stop where it is, the spirit of our Saviour so descends with his operations, that *councils rarely miss* of their desired effect."

This was fourteen years after the scheme of tyranny of 1706 had failed. Dr. Mather, in his preface, states five points in which all the New-England churches agreed. 1st. That the people had a right, when they pleased, to form a church. 2d. That each church has full, entire, and independent powers to elect officers, &c. 3d. That Pastors, so elected, have full authority to administer sacraments, &c. 4th. That in matters of *common concern* only, which affect the *tranquillity of other churches*, they ought to ask and pay great regard to advice. 5th. That the scriptures are a sufficient rule of faith, worship, and manners. He adds, "The Eleutherians (or friends of freedom) will consider how far any *further agreement*, (than in those points,) may be necessary, and whether these unreasonable sons of Procrustes, the narrow souled and imperious bigots for uniformity, will do religion any *real service* by the pressing of it." In all this we agree with Dr. Mather.

It is pretended both by the Committee and Reviewer, that defects in the Platform were early perceived and lamented, and you would infer, if you did not know these reverend combatants, that the church was at that early day in a *dreadful state*.

Dr. Mather himself is my authority against them. His work was before them, and in face of it they make these assertions.

In his *Ratio Disciplina*, after the platform had had a trial of seventy-five years, he says, "If the church refuse to give to any council an account of a matter, (upon trial,) a thing that *perhaps never happened*," &c. Again; "The church persisting in irregularity, they run the hazard of a proceeding, which was *never above once* come into, withdrawing communion." "He

" thanks Christ, that the end is obtained without such extremities."

Where do the committee procure their facts? Surely Hubbard and the author of the *Magnalia*, and of the *Ratio Disciplina*, must have known the disorders in the church, had they existed.

In page 170, Dr. Mather asserts, " that the councils of New-England *rarely meet* with contradictions from the churches " whose cases are submitted." " The New-England councils have been so regularly composed, that there has been LITTLE occasion for the old complaint, *omne concilium parit bellum*." That is to say, they had done better than the *old authoritative* councils.

" The synods of New-England know no weapons," says Dr. Mather, " but those which are spiritual. They pretend to no *juridical* authority, nor any *significancy* but what is merely *destructive and suasive*."

He adds, the churches of New-England cannot better express themselves than in the language of Festus Hommius. " The decrees of councils ought not to be propounded unto, or obtruded on the churches as Prætorian sayings, but they should be sent to the churches, that they may be examined by them according to the word of God, and that *if they be found to agree with it, they may be approved*." This submits the *whole* power to the churches. Let any one read the report prefixed to this essay, or the history of the church at Wallingford, and then say, whether the one or the other coincide with Hommius' ideas of the power of councils, which, Mather says, *expressed the sense of our New-England fathers*.













